

## **New Catholic high school to be part of Edinburg mixed-use development**

By **DANIEL PERRY** Monitor Staff Writer [dperry@themonitor.com](mailto:dperry@themonitor.com)

EDINBURG — School children, policemen, firemen and homeowners looking for a higher quality of life can now look to a 700-acre development in the city's north side that ceremonially broke ground Wednesday morning.

It will take at least seven years to completely finish La Sienna at the intersection of Monte Cristo Road and U.S. Highway 281 behind the Flying J Travel Plaza.

The development will be home to municipal police and fire substations, commercial businesses and at least 1,400 Spanish Colonial homes. The project will attract at least 4,500 residents and spur additional growth in the city.

"This is our anchor project north of Edinburg that will help us develop the area," said Ramiro Garza Jr., executive director of the Edinburg Economic Development Corp.

La Sienna creator SKC Development of McAllen donated 40 acres valued at \$3.5 million to the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brownsville to build its third high school. The school is expected to open as early as 2008 and is, for now, called Catholic Regional High School. It would serve 600 students in ninth to 12th grades.

Sister Marcella Ewers, the diocesan schools superintendent in San Juan, said parents have asked the diocese for years to create another high school for Upper Valley students. The contribution is a catalyst to make that dream a reality, she said.

Sandra Garcia, owner of San-Gar Development in McAllen, will be the school's project manager.

She became involved in the effort because her children attended Catholic primary school and did not have a convenient place to continue their secondary education in the same manner.

Garcia said the diocese should kick off a capital campaign in November. The campaign will not have a specific dollar amount, but Garcia said she would like to see \$13 million raised to construct and equip the building with modern technology.

She said the campaign would continue after the school opens to gather money for scholarships so children of all socioeconomic levels can have the chance at a religious-based education.

The new school will join the diocese's Oratory Schools of St. Philip Neri in Pharr and St. Joseph Academy in Brownsville. Both have a combined student population of at least 1,300 students.

Intermingled among the school, homes and retail businesses will be tree-lined roads, a vehicular bridge, neighborhood parks and running water features.

Some lots should be available for purchase in the first quarter of next year, said Kent Burns of SKC Development. The first phase calls for 97 homes, with Dan Sitterle Homes Inc. of McAllen building about 70 of them. Home values should begin at \$140,000.

Burns and Adrian A. Arriaga, broker and owner of AAA Real Estate & Investments in McAllen, each said discussions are under way with national retailers to locate at La Sienna, but that there were no solid commitments yet. Commercial land will be along the highway frontage road running on the project's western side.

La Sienna should generate \$400 million to the city's tax base, Mayor Joe Ochoa told ceremony attendees sitting and standing under a large white tent on land that is now a flat landscape of dirt and grass.

Garza said La Sienna is already being used by the economic development corporation to entice more big-name retailers to the city.

In recent months construction has taken place at the city's second Wal-Mart Supercenter at the corner of McColl and Trenton roads and Lowe's Home Improvement Warehouse at the intersection of West University Drive and McColl.

Sigs have already been posted announcing the pending opening of the city's first Applebee's and Quizno's Subs locations at Trenton Crossings Plaza, a retail development going up at the corner of Trenton and Jackson roads.

——Daniel Perry covers education and general assignments for The Monitor. You can reach him at (956) 683-4454. For this and other stories, visit [www.themonitor.com](http://www.themonitor.com).

