

## **Families in west Boynton Beach community still waiting on unfulfilled promises**

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Debbie Krost and her husband, Larry, bought their house west of Boynton Beach based on pamphlets that showed what was to come — a beautiful shopping center, an elementary school, a middle school and a park all within walking distance.

It was the same story for Seth Mittleman and his wife, who moved into a home just north of Krost. The list of young families goes on and on.

Today, there's an empty plot of land where the park should be. And the middle school isn't even on the Palm Beach County School District's five-year plan.

"When we bought, we were promised everything," Debbie Krost said. "We fell in love with what the area was going to look like. I understand that times have changed with the economy, but we just feel like we got the short end of the stick."

In 2002, developer GL Homes gave away 33 acres to the school district to be used for an elementary and middle school. They also gave 52 acres to Palm Beach County for a regional park.

At the time, the development company had many family communities planned for the surrounding area, as well the 200,000-square-foot Canyon Town Center shopping plaza.

Since then, most of the communities have been built and Canyon Town Center has come to life with activity. But plans for the middle school and park are nowhere in sight.

"We were hopeful at the time, but we didn't make any promises," said Larry Portnoy, vice president of GL Homes. "We try to be very careful not to make promises of things we can't control. We fulfilled our end of the bargain."

Seth Mittleman said that he doesn't blame GL Homes for those two projects not coming to fruition. He understands that the county and school district are working with tight budgets. But he's upset that GL Homes put so much emphasis on the proposed projects in their marketing materials.

"The development was sold to us as basically 'everything outside your door,'" he said. "It was an attractive package."

When he and his wife bought their home pre-construction in the Canyon Lakes community in 2003, they were thinking about starting a family. They now have a 4-year-old son and plans for the middle school and park are no further along than they were before he was born.

For Mittleman's neighbor, Adam Schachter, the issue is even more pressing. Schachter's oldest son is a third-grader at Sunset Palms Elementary School.

"Hands down, everyone moved here expecting that we were going to have an elementary school, a middle school and a park," he said. "Not to have that sense of comfort as to where my son is going to middle school is very frustrating for sure."

He is concerned, like many parents, about his children being split up from their elementary school friends. Some are zoned for Woodlands Middle School to the north in suburban Lake Worth, and

others, like Mittleman's son, are zoned for Odyssey Middle School to the southeast in suburban Boynton Beach.

Debbie Krost, whose daughter is a first-grader at Sunset Palms, is so outraged about the situations that she is considering sending her daughter to a private school. It's a financial burden the public school teacher didn't plan to take on when she bought her house in the Canyon Isles community at the height of the real estate market.

Kris Garrison, planning director for the school district, said that the school district uses the statistics from a professional demographer to decide what belongs in the five-year plan.

"We are aware that we have that land for a middle school, but the demographics have not yet shown a need for one there," she said. "When it's warranted, that's likely where we would build it."

Ken Lassiter, president of the Coalition of Boynton West Residential Associations, which represents 88 communities west of Boynton Beach, said that he remembers being at the grand opening of Sunset Palms Elementary School in August 2008.

"I saw nine classes of kindergartners and thought, 'That's a lot of kids,'" he said. "Where are they going to go in six years?"

Lassiter said that a few times each year he reminds school district officials about the proposed middle school and county officials about the proposed park.

"We will remember," he said. "We don't forget."