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Pearl Street project now under way

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Dozers and backhoes were busy this week as construction got under way in Ojai on the long-awaited Craftsman Village. "We're digging trenches for plumbing and grading off areas for concrete," said Aaron Emery, owner of the Santa Clarita-based Emery Construction, the builder contracted for the project. The concrete, he said, would probably be poured by Oct. 13.

"It's been a long time coming," said Rick Nielsen. "We're really excited to finally be here." Nielsen and business partner David Schuman are the principals in Raven Ridge Development, the Westlake Village owners of the forthcoming mixed-use property. Both men were on-



Ojai Valley News photo by Bill Warner

Heavy equipment has begun moving dirt at the Pearl Street site.

site Oct. 12 as the trenches were cut at 611 Pearl St.

"For three years now, we've been saying 'soon, very soon,'" Schuman said. But

Raven Ridge is thoroughgoing when it comes to planning, he added. The process of permitting and fine-tuning the logistics was not some-

thing he or Nielsen were inclined to rush.

Designed by Ojai architect

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Pearl:

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Marc Whitman, Craftsman Village received its original permit in 2005. At that time, the plan was for eight live-work units to be constructed on the 1.61-acre lot between Pearl Street and the Ojai Valley Trail. These units would have been designed for light manufacture, in keeping with the zoning at that time. It was not long before the housing market fell, though. When the market came back up again, investors were scarce.

By 2013, when Raven Ridge acquired the project, the area had been rezoned for Village Mixed Use, and Whitman drew up a new design calling for five live-work units, one residential unit and two commercial units.

Architecturally, the finished product will embrace strong elements of the California Craftsman style. Nu-

merous green features have been included, too, notably a rain garden and subsurface water-retention reservoir fed by a bioswale.

For certain, Schuman said, the live-work units would have strong appeal for business professionals, but market penetration might also result from the proximity to Weil Tennis Academy, Craftsman Village's neighbor directly across the Ojai Valley Trail.

The local element goes further, though. "We're using as many local subcontractors as possible," said Emery. At present, those include Casey Myers Equipment for the excavating and Wilson Builders for the framing, both of them Ojai-based businesses. "There will be more area businesses involved in the future," Emery added, "in-

cluding the subcontract for concrete."

"Getting the community involved in the project was a major thing we wanted to do," Nielsen said. "We wanted to put as few cars and trucks on that 33 as possible."

As public art goes, Nielsen said Raven Ridge opted for a \$27,000 donation to the Ojai Arts Commission, made in view of what was expected to be a lengthy planning stage. "It seemed to us that would be the best way to give back to the community," he said.

The donation was applied to the recently installed Douglas Lochner art in Libbey Park. "Someone asked me if I'd seen our lizard," he said. "I didn't know what they were talking about until they told me I'd find it in the park." When he saw it, he was delighted. "I think it's fantastic."