

Project blends past, present

Gilbert family retaining agricultural ties in planned housing development

BY GREG SVELUND TRIBUNE

Crews broke ground Thursday on Morrison Ranch Town Center, an agriculturally-themed project designed to reflect Gilbert's history as a farming and dairy town.

The town center project is the cornerstone of the 2,000-acre Morrison Ranch Area, the mixed-use development also planned to have a rural theme.

Morrison Ranch features open spaces, tree-lined residential neighborhoods, white picket fences, ranch-style homes and paths to link homes, schools and workplaces.

The Morrison family has farmed the area for 80 years and the Morrison Ranch development represents the change many East Valley farmers have had to make as urban growth encroaches on farmland, said Scott Morrison who runs a portion of the family's farm and business operations.

"We love what we've been doing as farmers, but we see what's happening all around us," Morrison said. "For us, the best way to tackle (growth) is to create something we can be proud of in the future."

The 50,000 square-foot building in the town center will be home to the Arizona Farm Bureau Center and Western Agricultural Insurance Co. An agricultural education center also is planned.

Family and Farm Bureau officials plowed a row of dirt with a 1928 tractor Thursday to symbolize the importance of agriculture in the East Valley's development.

"We feel a strong connection to that tractor, and to the way farming was done before that tractor existed,"

Morrison said. "We still believe in the future of farming, but it's not going to be right here."

Planning and development for the rest of Morrison Ranch will occur in phases over the next several years.

When complete, the area will include seven neighborhoods, two shopping centers, six convenience centers, two elementary schools, an 18-hole golf course and the town center.



Eric Rovey, 15, of Peoria drives a 1928 John Deere tractor Thursday to break ground on the Morrison Ranch Tower Center in Gilbert.

