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A brand new city is offering hundreds of new homes. Here's a look at life in Westlake.



By **LISA J. HURIASH** | SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL | MAY 17, 2019 | 2:32 PM



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The weekends are quiet here, along these freshly manicured streets on names like Switchgrass Lane and Rain Lilly Way. The workdays, though, are buzzing. Literally. The sound of hammers and drills and cement trucks fill the air. It's music to Christian Quintana. When he last year moved to the city of Westlake, his was the only house on the street. "When I moved here there was nobody, nobody, nobody," he said. "Just mosquitoes and frogs. But I knew." Once a territory of orange groves, Palm Beach County's youngest city is now booming as a destination for families moving into hundreds of new homes.

Since it became a city in 2016, it has grown: It absorbed another 200 acres to become a 4,000-acre city. Eventually, 4,500 homes will rise there. It is billed as a complete town, featuring shopping centers and a hospital.

Quintana, 38, who moved from Royal Palm Beach, is a real estate agent specializing in new homes. He said Westlake faces competition from other communities: He is selling homes at Arden, a **2,000-home** neighborhood under construction in Loxahatchee, and 3,900 homes in Avenir in Palm Beach Gardens.

But what makes Westlake unique is how it's a stand-alone city, he said. Quintana, who said he paid \$385,000 for his home, was drawn to how the entire city is new, and the services are all within footsteps.

"They're going to have restaurants, firefighters right there, everything right next to my house," he said. "When you go to a different community, you have to get your car and go far away. Everything is new — state of the art."

## Drawing inspiration

The land that was once 3,800 acres of orange groves in unincorporated Palm Beach County was purchased for \$51 million in 2013 by a developer, Minto Communities, which started creating the city from scratch. The same developer created two communities within Tradition in Port St. Lucie, also a community built in a big swoop.



### **Westlake, a new city in Palm Beach County**

Workers landscape a home in the Hammocks neighborhood of Westlake, a new municipality and residential community in Palm Beach County developed by Minto that is slated for 4,500 single family homes and townhomes. (Susan Stocker / Sun Sentinel)

Westlake got its name in part from Weston, the western Broward suburb of upscale, gated neighborhoods that also grew from a singular developer and a modern-day master plan. Arvida Corp. began building what would become Weston in the mid-1980s.

The name resemblance is a nod to what Weston accomplished, said John Carter, vice president of Minto. "It's a large-scale, master-planned community," he said. Since Weston, nothing of that scale has been built, he said. It's an example of "what can be."



The second part of the name Westlake comes from its proximity to Lake Okeechobee, he said. Westlake is about 6 miles north of Southern Boulevard, west of Royal Palm Beach and north of Wellington. Lion Country Safari is a short drive south.

Despite room for growth, Westlake may not reach Weston's population. The latest census estimated about 71,000 people call Weston home. At an average of 2.6 people per home, Westlake may eventually hover around 12,000.

That's the perfect size for the Glenda Gomez. She and her husband signed their contract Thursday for their new two-story home to share with their two

daughters with an extra, fourth bedroom to fit guests from Puerto Rico. The young professionals, who both work in the medical field, paid \$457,740 for the 3,300-square-foot home, on par with what they had in their homeland.



A bright bow was hung on the coral-colored front door and a roll of toilet paper in the guest bathroom with a carefully folded triangle tip was sealed with a Minto sticker.

Her family fled their native Puerto Rico after five months without electricity at their home after the **Category 5 Hurricane Maria** ravished the island in 2017.

The newness of Westlake excited Gomez, but it was the modernness that clinched the deal — specifically the **power lines underground**. “I feel more secure here,” she said.

## Construction underway

A year after Minto Communities-Florida sealed its land deal, the Palm Beach County Commission approved plans for 4,500 homes — as many as 800 of those can be townhouses — and 2 million square feet of shopping centers, offices and other business space. In 2016, Westlake became the county's city No. 39 after five residents voted to form a government in a mail-in election. Now, the population is exploding.

— Nearly 300 homes have sold in The Hammocks, a community under construction. When it concludes at the end of 2019, there will be 325 homes. Almost every lot in The Hammocks has a lake view.

— Hundreds of additional homes will start construction within 30 days in a neighborhood called The Meadows. The developer said 15 home sites have already been sold in an area that will ultimately have 380 homes. Both The Hammocks and The Meadows are a mix of one- and two-story homes priced from the high \$200,000s to the high \$500,000s. Nurses, cops, firefighters, teachers, healthcare and government workers get 3 percent off the price of a house.

— Last month, **Minto Communities** sold its first patch of land inside Westlake to another developer: 270 acres were sold to Kolter Homes for \$52 million, the land eyed for 800 homes for senior adults.

Services also are sprouting up for the new population.

Last month, Westlake's first emergency room opened. It's a 10,000-square-foot facility at Seminole Pratt Whitney Road and Persimmon Boulevard with eight exam rooms, one triage room, three rapid medical exam bays, imaging capability and on-site lab services.

Police and fire services will continue to be provided by Palm Beach County, and a new four-bay fire station is expected to be built by the end of the year within the city limits.



Three schools — Golden Grove Elementary, Western Pines Community Middle School and Seminole Ridge Community High School — used to be in unincorporated areas, but now are within Westlake’s city limits. Another 12 acres of land have been set aside to build another school.

And Westlake Adventure Park just opened last weekend, offering a concert pavilion, grills for picnics, playground, bocce ball courts, lagoon pool with a waterslide and splash pad. A pool for adults and outdoor basketball courts are planned.

Minto Communities plans to also build the city its first 50-acre park with sports fields.

Debi Murray, the chief curator of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County, said she understands the push west.

“We are running out of space and who doesn’t want to move into a brand new home,” she said. “Prices along the coast have just skyrocketed; there is nothing affordable. One half of me is happy and one half is sad because we’re losing wild land and orange groves.”

Murray joked the county is adding a new city every decade. Loxahatchee Groves, which was incorporated in 2006, had been the last city to form in Palm Beach County. Before that, Wellington in 1996.

Darline Karbowski moved to her new home with her teenage son in March fresh off a divorce. Like most homeowners, she parks a golf cart in her driveway. It’s how the locals get around. “It’s the best new beginning I could have asked for,” she said. “I’ve made a ton of friends. [People] are beyond friendly. There’s no drama.”

Publix is a 10-minute drive into Loxahatchee, as is a drugstore.

“I was looking for something that was close and available to me within 15 minutes for shopping,” said Karan Nowak, who moved in December. “I didn’t want to go too far into West Palm because of the traffic.”