

South Fulton's Serenbe --- diamond in rough market

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There's not much in the way of good news about the U.S. housing market right now, especially in metro Atlanta. Foreclosures, endless days on the market, double mortgage payments, it's all bad.

Ah, but wait, what's that off in the distance, way outside the Perimeter? According to the editors of Cottage Living magazine, there's a bright spot deep in south Fulton County. Serenbe, a 1,000-acre conservation community in Chattahoochee Hill Country, was named to the magazine's annual national Top 10 Neighborhoods list and graces the July/August cover.

"We wanted to celebrate what is right about American housing right now," said Eleanor Griffin, editor in chief of Cottage Living. "We all make jokes about McMansions. But the magic is in livability, a sense of community and character."

The winners — from Charleston, S.C., to Bend, Ore. — were selected for their livable scale, pedestrian-friendly streets, neighborhood involvement and, of course, visual appeal. The editors also judged the communities in three categories: greenfield, a development on previously unused land; infill; and adaptive reuse, which is essentially rehabilitating existing buildings. Serenbe won in the greenfield category.

"Growth is inevitable," Griffin said, "but you can manage with smart growth. Quality growth where livability is not sacrificed to the almighty dollar."

While the editors found such intown neighborhoods as Ansley Park, Grant Park and Peachtree Hills charming, Griffin said, the settlement near Palmetto seemed to embody the principles of the modern cottage community.

Serenbe was founded by businessman Steve Nygren about six years ago on the principle that land preservation and conservation is essential to the health of the community. Even one that includes shops, restaurants, galleries and homes from \$350,000 up to \$1 million.

"This whole project began as a reaction to urban sprawl and now it's a national model as a different way to deal with urban sprawl," Nygren said. "We feel very proud."

COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

Atlanta Symphony at Serenbe with fireworks show. 8 p.m. today. Hutcheson Ferry Park, 9774 Hutcheson Ferry Road, Chattahoochee Hill Country (Palmetto). 770-463-0463 or www.serenbe.com. Free. Concertgoers are encouraged to bring portable seats or blankets for seating.