Iowa’s first HFI home sold in Manning

Two Manning men, Ron Reischl and Jeremy Carroll, have formed Front Porch Living LLC with plans to bring more homes to Manning.

“I’ve been trying to do this for several years. I’ve tried to partner with several contractors in the past, but I’ve had no success because they are already busy. Then I talked to Jeremy,” said Reischl.

“Ron and I are similar in this way,” said Carroll. “All I was hearing was why things could not happen. We felt there was a path to do it, and we knew there were property lots available. When we set out, our goal was to construct five homes a year, whether its homes constructed by Homes For Iowa or stick-built semi-custom.”

Homes For Iowa (HFI) is a state program modeling a successful program in South Dakota. It has a two-fold purpose: to provide affordable workforce housing for rural areas and to provide skills and rehabilitate prisoners.

Region XII COG spoke to the Manning City Council earlier this year about the opportunity to purchase prison-built homes.

Manning City Administrator Dawn Meyer, Public Works Manager Justin Mundt, Carroll and Reischl went to Newton, IA, to check out some prison-built homes. They were amazed by the quality of the materials and the quality of the construction techniques. The homes are built by minimum security prisoners with guidance from homebuilding experts outside the prison.

“We had planned to put up one of those homes and a stick-built home from the ground up, however, lumber prices have gone up two and a half times since March so we have put the stick-built home on hold hoping prices will go down,” Reischl said. “I want Manning to grow and stay vibrant. There is a lot of price sensitivity on homes in Manning. People are just not willing to spend a lot unless it is a custom-built home. We’re not planning on making much money, but we want to see Manning grow,” he said.

A Carroll County housing study done three or four years ago indicated a need in Manning. There are a number of homes available for less than $100,000, but Manning has few homes available in the $150,000 to $250,000 range, and there haven’t been any new speculative homes available for 25 years.

Reischl stressed, “We do not intend to compete against the local home builders. We plan to build speculative semi-custom homes at a price point that is not being offered today.”

“There is a need for homes. The lack of available housing has been a barrier to Manning’s growth,” he said.

HFI homes are single story homes with 1200 square feet, three bedrooms and two baths. Buyers can select from four different layouts. The Manning home has an additional 96 square feet, two-car garage, full basement, two egress windows for the possibility of future bedrooms and stubbed in plumbing for a future bath. Homes will be priced in the low $200,000 range.

Front Porch Living is the first private company to purchase a HFI home. This home was the first delivery to a private company and will be the first HFI home to be occupied. Before the new Manning home arrived, it was already sold to a local family.

Front Porch Living has purchased two lots in south Manning. The new home is located at 1003 Pleasant Drive and a lot for a future home is about a block south at 1405 Nishnabotna Dr.
Since this HFI home sold quickly, Front Porch Living plans to put up another next spring. “This is not a one-time thing,” said Carroll. “It is to cultivate and keep moving this community forward. The whole point of this is not for wealth.”

“We are trying to find different partnerships and different avenues with people in the community that have an outlet like, for example, Larry Stangl who has lots for sale out by Senior Living,” he said. “We left the LLC open when the corporation was put together. For example, if someone would come to us and say they have four new engineers hired and need homes. That might create an opportunity to partner with them.”

“One of the things we will try to emphasize is enjoyment of the outdoors, thus the name. It is a little difficult with this first home that we brought in, but once we do more semi-customized builds, we hope to add more porch space,” said Reischl.

Home arrives at site in Manning and crew prepares to move it to its foundation.