

Call it 'Pricey Valley'

Day Valley county's highest-priced community

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SANTA CRUZ — David Brumfield just wanted a place in the country where his children could raise animals when he moved to Day Valley in 1967.

Little did he know that 23 years later, Day Valley would become the county's most expensive place to own a home, according to recently released statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau.

■ Highs and lows of housing prices — Page A6

The median value of a home in Day Valley is \$350,600, making the sunny spot below the Aptos hills the county's highest-priced community. Day Valley, with a population of 2,842 people residing in 621 homes — many of them with spectacular ocean views — also has the highest percentage of

dwelling valued at \$500,000 or more, with 19.4 percent.

Day Valley homes shatter the county's median value of \$256,100, and the state's figure of \$195,500. The median price means that half the homes are valued above the figure, half below.

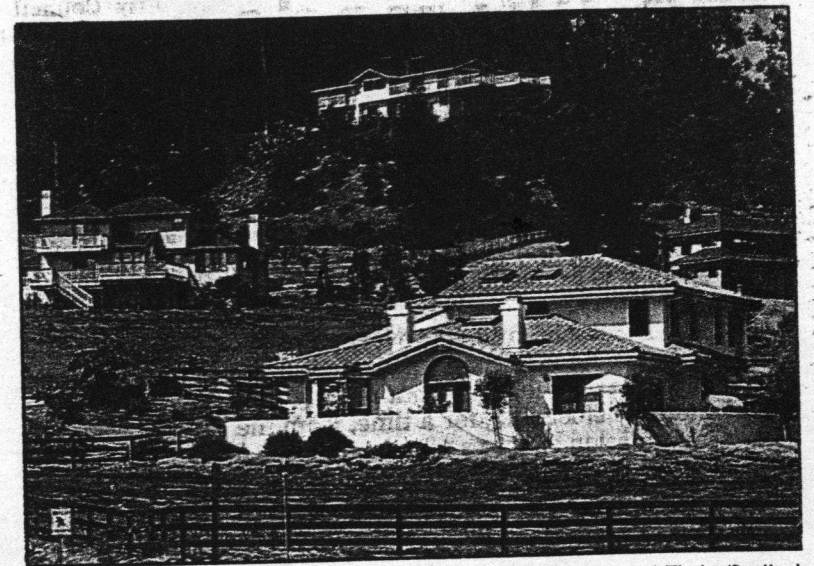
Homes in Freedom and Boulder Creek, with median value of \$185,200 and \$195,900, respectively, are the most affordable in the county, says the 1990 census.

The three most expensive areas

to own a home in the county are all in Aptos: Day Valley, \$350,600; Aptos Hills/Larkin Valley, \$337,900; and Rio del Mar, \$321,900.

In comparison, median home values in Santa Cruz County were below the figure for Santa Clara County — \$289,400 — but higher than the figures for San Diego County — \$186,700 — and Santa Barbara County — \$250,000, ac-

Please see DAY VALLEY — A6



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Large, sunny lots make Day Valley an attractive area.

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Continued from Page A1

According to the Census.

Brumfield, a 64-year-old real estate appraiser, said Day Valley property values "really didn't take hold until the '80s," when more homeowners discovered the area's sunny weather, easy access and rural feel.

Day Valley was largely unknown — and underpriced — when the Brumfield family moved there in the '60s.

"It was 1967 and we had a home in Rio del Mar and we wanted to get to the country because we had animals. We had rented for two years prior to that."

The Brumfields sold the Rio del Mar home for \$21,500 — they originally purchased it in 1961 for \$17,500 — and packed up the truck and moved to Day Valley.

The family's 1½-acre lot cost \$5,500; they built a 1,900-square-foot home for \$21,500, and added a 15-by-30-foot swimming pool — for \$4,300 — in 1973.

In fact, the swimming pool, if built today, would cost almost as much as the entire home did in 1967.

Today, Brumfield estimates the

ranch-style home is worth \$350,000.

"If I was in a hurry I would take \$300,000. Under proper supervision, I would take \$350,000, and my wife probably thinks it's worth \$450,000."

Robert Bailey, co-owner of Bailey Properties in Aptos, said Day Valley is "growing in popularity."

"It's an area where the land values have moved to the point where people are building more expensive houses," said Bailey. Since lots there must be larger to accommodate septic systems and county planning regulations, it makes no sense to build small homes on such expensive lots, said Bailey.

Brumfield estimated that his lot alone was worth more than \$200,000.

In recent years two high-priced rural housing developments — Forest and Meadows and Meadows Ranch — have sprung up in Day Valley. Values of those homes range from \$400,000 to \$900,000.

Day Valley's location on the inland side of Highway 1 makes it sunnier in the summer. "The fog burns off much earlier, and there is a 3- to 5-degree difference in temperature.

"Traditionally speaking, you've got larger parcels there, so there's a little more privacy," said Bailey. "There's definitely a more rural type of feeling and it's a mix of homes, custom-built homes, a mix of architecture and design."

The valley also affords relatively easy freeway access for commuters. "It's three to five minutes from the freeway and it's not going to take much longer to get to the freeway than it would from Seaside," said Bailey.

Those looking for more Day Valleys on the county's landscape will be disappointed, said Steve Matarazzo, principal planner for the county Planning Department.

"I don't see that," said Matarazzo. Most of the county's rural parcels, he said, are outside the Urban Services Line, which, according to the General Plan, curbs widespread rural development. Day Valley is also outside the Urban Services Line, which accounts for its larger parcels and the need for septic tanks and leach fields.

"Day Valley is very unique," said Bailey. "I don't think you're going to see it repeated or cookie-cuttered in another place."

On the lower end of the scale, the census says Freedom and Boulder Creek homes are the area's cheapest in the \$185,000-\$195,900 range, figures which match the state median.

Two San Lorenzo Valley communities, Ben Lomond and Felton, have median home values of \$241,000 and \$213,000, respectively.

Brumfield, who has been appraising homes for 38 years, said the comparatively low values of SLV homes can be attributed to several factors, including its transformation from a enclave of summer cabins to a community of full-time residences. Many of the

homes there, he said, are small, built on down-sized lots.

Bailey said lower values in the San Lorenzo Valley are not necessarily a bad thing. Real estate sales there, despite a statewide "leveling" trend, have been brisk, he said.

The San Lorenzo Valley has been "a very active part of the real estate market in the last six months ...

"Some of the land values (there) are a little more affordable. There is a greater number of smaller homes. It opens up opportunities for that first-time home buyer, and that first-time investor," said Bai-

ley.

The census used respondents' estimates of how much their property would fetch — whether home, condominium, lot or mobile home — if it were for sale. Bailey and Brumfield said such quotes are generally accurate, albeit a little high.

"I think people normally will error on the high side," said Bailey. "But if you get enough people talking about those numbers they'll be pretty accurate. As prices have increased, clients tend to track the values much better. ... People tend to get a better feel for the value of their properties."