

Welcome center in The Villages' newest town square set to open in the spring



The new \$35 million welcome center in Eastport at the Villages will open in the spring. (Rendering by Schenkel Shultz)

By [Katie Sartoris](#) | Newsroom@GrowthSpotter.com | GrowthSpotter Contributor

PUBLISHED: December 26, 2024 at 3:30 PM EST

A new welcome center for The Villages' newest town square is under construction, expected to open in the spring of 2025.

[Schenkel Shultz](#), a Central Florida interior design and architectural studio, is behind the \$35 million project — the Welcome Center at Eastport.

The Villages is currently home to four town squares throughout the massive retirement community. Spanish Springs Town Square, on the north side of The Villages in Lady Lake, is the original. Lake Sumter Landing Market Square, which is off County Road 466 in Lake County, opened in 2004. Brownwood Paddock Square, off of County Road 44 in Sumter County, opened in 2012 and Sawgrass Grove, off of Meggison Road near the Florida Turnpike, also in Sumter County, opened in 2022.

[Eastport](#) is the latest, located a little over two miles southwest from Sawgrass Grove, off Central Parkway in Sumter County. The 250-acre square is currently taking shape, with plans for a hotel, shopping, dining, golf and various parks, all connected by a network of trails and pathways around manmade Central Lake. It will also be home to Olympia

Recreation, a recreation complex which includes an indoor gym, a rock-climbing center and other outdoor recreation options.

The welcome center is an integral part of the new square. The three-story, 99,359-square foot project is inspired by the story of the fictitious Eastman family and their boat-building legacy.



The bottom floor of the welcome center includes a coffee house and a lakefront porch with views of Central Lake, dragon boat racing and promenade. (Rendering by Schenkel Shultz)

“The intention of the design behind the Welcome Center was to capture the essence of The Villages and the unique lifestyle it promotes for its residents,” said Ekta Desai, design lead and partner at Schenkel Shultz. “Creating an inviting ambiance was essential to encouraging engagement and synergy among visitors and residents of all ages.”

The bottom floor of the welcome center includes a coffee house and a lakefront porch with views of Central Lake, dragon boat racing and promenade. The corridors are industrial-inspired, made to feel like historic factories, but complemented by modern design elements including natural light, indoor-outdoor connections and flexible seating. The top floors have offices, meeting rooms and more than 6,000 square feet of conference space. Construction began on the welcome center in October of 2023.



The upper levels will house essential administrative functions including offices, meeting rooms and over 6,000 square feet of conference space. (Rendering by Schenkel Shultz)

This is not the first time Schenkel Shultz has worked with The Villages. The firm designed [Middleton](#), a community within The Villages for non-retirees complete with new schools on The Villages Charter School campus in Middleton — an early childhood center, an elementary and middle school and a high school. The town center at Middleton opened this fall.

“Our experience with (The Villages) has been phenomenal, and they are an excellent client to work with,” Desai told GrowthSpotter.

The Villages, already spanning three counties and multiple municipalities, continues to grow. In February, [Leesburg approved a Villages of Westlake expansion](#), making way for another 6,800 homes in the Leesburg portion of the retirement community. At the time, The Villages had already built 2,500 homes in Leesburg with plans to build a total of 14,000 homes.

And last year, [The Villages real estate arm bought 900 acres](#) in Mascotte. Plans for that property have not been announced.