Home and Garden Column

GREEN HOME

The Florida Green Building Coalition’s Green Home Certification offers a way to help some homebuyers and home sellers connect in this tight housing market.

The FGBC’s Green Home program provides brand recognition for home features that save water and energy indoors and outside, add durability, and support healthy indoor air quality. It is a way of helping sellers market and buyers locate products with desired features.

Typically, homes sell based on location, location, location. In addition, buyers look for square footage, number of rooms and then special features. Buyers these days are money conscious and very aware of the purchase price. Certification programs offer an additional feature for comparison to help differentiate one home from another. In addition, certification programs highlight features that have an effect on the bottom line into the future- maintenance costs.

Lower energy and water use and reduced landscape maintenance costs mean lower monthly expenses. Savings may even mean the ability to buy more house and still have lower out of pocket expenses each month.

Certification inspections offer a way of verifying that construction practices used and features built into or added to the home. Third party verification means that someone that someone other than the builder or sales agent or homeowner is vouching for the quality of the product.

FGBC’s Green Home program is not the only program that offers third-party verification of construction practices. Other states have been developing programs and the National Association of Home Builders has developed a model program for other states to adopt and modify. The University of Florida developed the Florida Yards and Neighborhoods landscape certification. USEPA has an Energy Star Homes Program and St. John’s River Water Management District now has a Water Star program. Other programs certify wildlife habitat and environmental design.

FGBC’s program began when the Florida Solar Energy Center, University of Florida, utility companies, builders, product suppliers, and others realized that national standards might not apply to Florida’s special environmental and climate issues. The FGBC Green Home certification is not new. In fact, in July, they rolled out version 5.0 of the checklist that certifying agents use to score a home.

The checklist of standards looks simple, but outlined in the 51 page Reference Guide are the real details of the program requirements. This text with web links is a valuable resource in learning more about some of the principles of Green Building.

There are eight categories of items as part of the inspection: energy, water, lot choice, site, health, materials, disaster mitigation and a general section. Some individual items are required and others are optional with various points assigned to each item depending on the importance. The program requires adoption of some items from all categories. For example, a home that is energy efficient but that does not conserve water would not qualify.

As of May, the FGBC website listed 5 certified Green Homes in Osceola County and all were located in Harmony. Congratulations to Inland Homes, MWA Builders and Wetherington Builders for setting the pace locally. We still have a way to go to catch up with other counties. Since the program started, it has certified more than 1250 homes and 558 were in WCI Communities.
Whether you are a buyer and want to locate one of the certified homes or you are a builder or developer looking for a different marketing angle, you may want to consider a home certification program. Contact me for more info.

The Florida Master Naturalist Program
The FMNP Freshwater Wetlands Module is scheduled for Wednesdays beginning October 3 through November 7 from 8:30 am until 4:30 pm. Learn about Florida’s various wetland ecosystems and the plants and animals that live there. There will be field trips in addition to presentations and videos. The program is designed to be of interest to outdoor enthusiasts whether newcomers or long time residents. The content is suitable for novice naturalists or environmental professionals looking for a Florida overview. Teachers as well as sportsmen have enjoyed the program in the past.

The 2007 Osceola County Great Gardener Program is scheduled for Monday and Wednesday nights beginning October 1st through October 17th from 6 pm to 9 pm. Taught by University of Florida/IFAS faculty, the classes cover a wide range of horticulture topics, including turfgrass, citrus, trees and shrubs, irrigation, pest management, and plant pathology.

Classes will be held at Osceola Heritage Park, Extension Services building in Kissimmee. A fee will cover the cost of educational material and reference books. Upon completion of the course, participants receive a certificate. UF/IFAS Extension Services has a number of environmental educational programs, of which you may want to take advantage. Registration is limited so call 321-697-3000 to find out more.

Eleanor C. Foerste
Osceola County Extension
1921 Kissimmee Valley Lane
Kissimmee, FL 34744
321-697-3000
407-908-4379 cell
efoe@osceola.org,
osceola.ifas.ufl.edu
Date: September 16, 2007