PLANT LIFE COLUMN

GREEN BUILDING

You're familiar with a greenhouse to grow plants in, but are you familiar with a "green" home to grow families in? I am not referring to the color and you cannot see through the walls.

A green home looks like any other home. You will not see any unusual features inside or outside, however, the improvements in the quality of construction and design choices benefit the resident and builder as well as the community.

Osceola County is considering ways to encourage green home construction and there is mention of green homes and sustainable development in the draft of the comprehensive plan that will be available for review soon.

The Florida Green Home designation applies to homes that have met criteria specified by the Florida Green Building Coalition. The coalition is a non-profit organization composed of individuals representing a variety of businesses and industries who want to encourage a voluntary construction standard that reduces the impact on the environment while providing increased value to the purchaser.

Fred Fallman, a builder in Clermont, built the first certified Florida Green Home recently. He recognized the value of the program after building and promoting energy efficient Energy Star homes for the past several years. Energy Star homes are more energy efficient than standard construction and therefore save money for the resident each month they live in the home. A Florida Green Home does not have to meet EPA’s Energy Star Homes program standards but there are extra points in the scoring system.

Fallman saw the potential for adding features to his homes that would help set his homes apart from other builders in his area. There are marketing incentives that help direct traffic to his business. The quality of the construction keeps purchasers happy, therefore reducing call backs after they move in.

Homebuyers who choose to own a Florida Green Home can expect significantly lower utility bills as both water and electricity use are reduced by the design and layout of the home.

Following the University of Florida's recommended landscape practices can reduce costs of irrigation and fertilizer as well as reduce pest problems and get credit toward certification as a Florida Green Home. Our staff teaches Florida Yards and Neighborhoods classes to help you get more value for the dollars you invest in landscaping. Low Maintenance Landscapes will be offered July 16 at 6:30 at the St. Cloud Civic Center and Landscape Pest Management will be offered on July 18 at 6:30 pm. Call 407-846-4181 to reserve a seat and free handout materials.

Healthy home features are also encouraged by the green home standards. Proper moisture control outside and indoor dehumidification result in less mold and mildew and fewer problems with allergies and asthma. Low VOC (volatile organic compound) paints, stains and sealers as well as minimal carpet and no exposed particleboard in cabinets or shelving reduce air pollution indoors. An integrated pest management plan that uses less toxic products also reduces indoor air pollution.

Energy and water costs are crucial issues that impact the bottom line every month. Design decisions may cost a little more on the front end but testimonials from home buyers indicate that those costs are often offset by incentives and easily balanced over the short run by money savings every month. Consider green construction practices to keep some green in your pocket. You will also be helping to stretch our natural resources and care for the environment we all use and enjoy.

More information on the Florida Green Building Coalition and the Florida Green Home Standards as well as a detailed reference guide are available online at Florida Green Building Coalition. Developers and
community planners should note that drafts of standards for developments and municipalities are in the works.

A listing of Energy Star home builders can be found on the EPA's website at Energy Star, under the "Partners and Incentives Locator". Local builders include Americas Homes, Arnco, Cambridge, Fox and Jacobs, Rey Homes, Southern Designs General Contracting and Weatherington Builders. Several developments have committed to offer only Energy Star Homes. Harmony east of St. Cloud and Amberly Park off Boggy Creek Road and Osceola Parkway are examples.

Home builders, contractors, architects and inspectors can learn more about green building at upcoming Build Green and Profit programs offered by the University of Florida. Classes will be held at the Disney Wilderness Preserve near Poinciana off Pleasant Hill Road on July 17 and 18 and August 22 and 23. The classes are designed to provide technical information as well as meet the 14 hour license renewal requirements. Call (321) 697-3000 for a faxable registration form or register online at the Florida Energy Extension Service. Credit card payment is accepted.

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Date: July 12th, 2002