



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Local Builder finds the way out of the housing slump is paved in green.

North Port—In January of 2007, Charlotte County experienced its worst month for real estate sales since the month Hurricane Charley hit in 2004. Home sales have struggled to recover every month since. This summer, even the mighty WCI Communities sought Chapter 11 protection on its vast property portfolio, including \$1.44 billion in collateral properties in Florida alone. But one local builder hasn't let the gloom and doom deter his plans for growth. Instead, he found a way around it.

North Port-based American Homes, LLC has found the way out of the building crisis is paved in green. Certified Green, that is. In an effort to differentiate his product from the myriad of foreclosures, resales and empty inventory homes, President and CEO of American Homes Dennis Kotaska decided to separate himself from the rest by building "high-performance," environmentally sound homes.

"These homes sell themselves," said Kotaska. "When compared side-by-side to a traditionally built home, green homes are simply better constructed, more affordable to live in, and safer for both the homebuyer and the planet."

John Berlen, network engineer for Charlotte County and recent American Homes buyer, agrees. He and his wife Cathy, their four teenaged children and his father will soon be moving into their new 6 bedroom, 4 ½ bath home, where the only things they will sacrifice are high energy bills and weekends spent doing maintenance. The Berlen's new home has all the features you'd expect in a home

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American Homes finds the way out of the building crisis is paved in green. 2-2-2.

priced in the \$500s, such as a double red oak staircase that provides convenient access to the second floor from the foyer, living room, and kitchen, nine- and ten-foot ceilings, an elegant master suite, and a kitchen fit for a gourmet. But it's what you can't see that makes the Berlen home so special.

Soy-based blown foam insulation, sealed roof system, impact resistant and low-e thermal-insulated, energy efficient windows and doors, a three-zone AC system, passive solar for hot water, and low-VOC paint and finishes that eliminate the harsh chemicals and "new home" smell that often endures in a non-green house for weeks after moving day are just a few of this home's many green features. Plus, it's built to Miami-Dade hurricane standards.

"I was here during Hurricane Charley, and I watched my home and my neighborhood get destroyed. Because of my job, I can't evacuate—instead, I'll need to ride it out in a County building. So I have to know that if it ever happens again, my family will be safe," explained Berlen. "We even installed a 16kw generator that kicks on automatically in a power outage."

Other custom features added to the Berlen home include the conversion of the formal living room into his father's bedroom, and a fourth bathroom was added with a zero-step shower to complete the suite. Wider doorways and hallways to allow for wheelchair passage were also included. But perhaps the most exciting additions will come in the form of rebate checks a few weeks after moving day.

"There is a potential to save thousands because of going green," said Rob Struckman, a certified inspector for the Florida Green Building Coalition, the organization responsible for making sure homes meet exacting green specifications for energy and materials efficiency and conservation. "While the Berlens might have spent two to four percent more in purchase price to go green, they'll make up the difference quickly in thousands of dollars in energy rebates and lower utility bills each month."

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“Dennis [Kotaska] is way ahead of the curve,” said Mike Evans, Sarasota, Manatee and Charlotte Counties regional director for Eco-\$mart, Inc., a for-profit company that helps builders adopt green building practices and products. “Some builders treat green building as a code, when instead it’s a total philosophy,” said Evans. “American Homes is building for the future, right now, by creating homes that can sustain their beauty, their integrity, and their economic advantages for decades to come.”

In fact, the economic advantages begin before the home is even built. American Homes’ affiliate lender, Community National Bank of Sarasota County, is offering up to \$7000 in closing costs on loans that are zero percent interest during the construction phase.

“It’s a happy coincidence that going green with energy saving features and storm resistant construction has meant growth for my company.” said Kotaska. “But more important is what it means to my buyers in the long-term benefits of lower insurance costs, lower energy costs, and greater peace of mind.”

American Homes offers a wide range of home styles built to Green standards and priced from the \$140s.

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