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Article published Apr 21, 2008

Upstate housing going 'green'

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Published: Monday, April 21, 2008 | Updated: 5:29 pm

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Hays Farm, located in Marietta, Ga., is a green community. More homes in the Upstate are going “green.”

Homes in the Upstate are going "green" in increasing numbers, with benefits for the environment as well as for homeowners' pocketbooks and health, according to Angela Viney, director of Sustainable Communities in the Spartanburg office of Upstate Forever.

The Elements, a new condominium and townhome community in Greenville, is being built by Nick Gilley of TRV Developments according to EarthCraft and Energy Star standards. EarthCraft serves as a blueprint for building healthy, comfortable homes that protect the environment and lower utility bills. The Energy Star program emphasizes energy-saving heating, cooling and water heating.

"We've had a tremendous amount of interest in it," he says of The Elements.

For Gilley, the project represents much more than capitalizing on a trend.

"It really matters," he says about creating energy-efficient housing. He is committed to making sure that each project he builds in the future is even more energy-efficient than the last.

His says that despite some added cost in the building process, the company has decided to take the increase off of their bottom line instead of increasing prices.

The commitment to building an environmentally-friendly project began in the site selection. Located less than a mile and a half from downtown Greenville, a walking trail will tie into the Swamp Rabbit trail. Residents will be able to easily walk or bike to the downtown area or to local schools.

"It benefits our health and the environment since it cuts down on pollution from driving," Gilley explains.

Throughout the construction process, he has been committed to reducing waste. Water runoff is drained from the roof and stored under the parking area. This ensures that Richland Creek, which is located nearby, isn't affected by runoff. Rainwater is collected for use in garden plots that are available to each resident.

Lumber used in the project was harvested from sustainable forests, meaning that for every tree that is cut down, two new ones are planted.

When some trees on the site had to be taken down, they were milled and used in trimwork. Underbrush that couldn't be used was ground up and used as mulch. Instead of hauling away excess shingles, the company had them ground up for use on the sub-base under the street.

In addition to the positive impact on the environment, owners will also benefit from living in a green home. Gilley uses 2x6 lumber instead of 2x4s, which helps create a tight home. Fresh air intakes on the HVAC system ensure that fresh air is going into your home.

The changes result in a 30-40 percent savings on energy bills compared to what they might be in a home built by a tract builder, Gilley says.

In addition, owners can apply for a lower energy-efficient rate from their power company and save even more, Viney points out.

They're also finding that the resale value of their homes is greater than the average home. A green home

can be a major selling point to prospective buyers.

Carpets used in The Elements are 100 percent recycled, and paints used have no volatile organic compounds. These are less likely to cause problems with allergy and asthma.

Compass Homes also is committed to building green homes and is an Energy Star Partner.

The first step to energy efficiency is orienting the house correctly, with the rear of the house facing south. That way, the midday sun isn't beating down on your home, increasing temperatures and thus increasing energy usage and utility bills, Steve Brown of Compass Traditional Homes explains.

He also tries to avoid clear-cutting trees from a home site by cutting down the least number of trees possible.

"We are really choosy about the trees. We want to set the house in there to make it look like it's been there for years," he says.

A home that meets Energy Star standards should result in lower utility bills and healthier indoor air.

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