

HOMES CAN BE HIGH-PERFORMANCE AND AFFORDABLE

OK, I admit it. I'm one of those whose perspective gets skewed by the company I keep. Without going too far afield, I'm specifically referring to hanging around with green building types. There is no doubt that this direction in the building industry is both significant and permanent, but not everyone is on board, at least consciously, and I tend to forget that there is still some resistance to the whole idea of "environmental building."

By now we know that green building is far more than being nice to Mother Nature – not that this is a bad thing. We also know that doing the right thing doesn't have to price buyers out of the market. Still it is always gratifying to be able to point to real examples.

High-performance homes with a green overlay are no longer an anomaly. The stories we see, however, often highlight homes that the average middle class home buyer will see only during a visit to the Parade of Homes. So it is always good to see examples – like Family Homes in Pueblo and Thistle Community Housing in Longmont – of builders that are producing homes for buyers in the moderate income range, homes that score high points for efficiency and green features, and also qualify for the federal tax credit of \$2,000 for meeting the criteria of 50 percent energy savings. How are they doing it?

Thistle Community Housing is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing housing for low- to moderate-income working families. A member of Built Green® for the past year, Thistle is embracing Built Green® and ENERGY STAR as the foundation for all new starts. So far, about 30 percent of the 25 completed homes in the Longmont community have qualified for the \$2,000 tax credit, and all homes are scoring about 70 points on the HERS (Home Energy Rating System) Index scale – about 30 percent better than the 2006 International Energy Efficiency Code. While a community land trust lowers the overall home price, Thistle is learning and looking for strategies that add performance without a premium. The pricier enhancements for Thistle homes are also the ones reducing the overall cost of operating the home, things like 92 percent-efficient furnaces, ENERGY STAR windows and added duct insulation. The hurdles are still there, like ongoing training for subcontractors to keep up with high-performance building techniques. But in spite of the challenges, Thistle is scoring in the 195-point range on the *Built Green® Checklist* and is dedicated to continuous improvement.

Family Homes in the Pueblo market has taken Built Green® to heart. A new member only a year ago, the company is producing about 70 homes a year that are rating in the high 50s and low 60s on the HERS scale, which is an energy savings of about 40 percent over a home built to the 2006 IECC. These homes are relatively modest in size, reducing the total cost without sacrificing quality. The energy package, sometimes challenging to the new kids on the green block, includes a 90 percent-plus efficient furnace, 13 SEER air conditioner and a tankless water heating system.

Nick Katzer, vice president of marketing for Family Homes, says the benefits of "going green" have been noticeable in recent sales in spite of the down market: "People are more excited about lower utility bills than a year ago, and our sales team is well-informed about the energy benefits of our homes because they all live in our homes." In addition to experiencing the cost and comfort benefits of a Built Green®/ENERGY STAR home, the entire company is trained in the benefits of Built Green® homes, a key component to setting the company apart.

These communities are two of a growing number of market-rate and below-market-rate homes embracing the long-term value of a Built Green®/ENERGY STAR home. Affordability means not only being able to get into a home, but also being able to manage the cost of operating and maintaining it. Built Green®, in its partnership with ENERGY STAR, is helping make that a reality. 🏠

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