

Builder Wise

DECEMBER 2006



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season*

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See page 6



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4



8



14

On the cover:

Photography by Robert Matta;
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Location: Ashmore, Bowen Family Homes

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Builder Wise

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DESIGN AND PRODUCTION
Cox Creative Services – Atlanta, Georgia

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features

4 Building high tech into new homes

More buyers are demanding the latest gadgets and efficiencies.

6 “Energy efficiency” moving up the list

People wanting to buy a new home – or remodel their current one – are making energy efficiency a higher priority than ever before.

8 Listening skills

Paying careful attention to a changing marketplace keeps Peachtree Residential Properties one of Atlanta’s premier builders.

10 HBAG Awards

2006 winners named at convention in Puerto Rico.

11 AGL promotions

Donna Peeples, new Vice President of Marketing

12 In the news

- Add color, interest to kitchens with retro appliances
- PEARL can be a life saver
- Free-standing, natural-gas stoves warm and inspire

14 Accommodation

Building and remodeling for the disabled makes good sense for everyone.

Building high tech into new homes

More buyers are demanding the latest gadgets and efficiencies.

BY JACK MCGEE

With the convergence of whole-house wiring and rising energy costs, today's homebuilders must be savvy about new technology and electronics in order to satisfy modern homebuyers who expect their new houses to be pre-wired for energy management devices, home theaters, monitored security, automation and more.

In fact, homebuilders who fail to introduce these high-tech features to increasingly receptive buyers are missing out on an opportunity to increase their profits and differentiate themselves from the competition, according to research by the Consumer Electronics Association (CEA).

Word of mouth among family and friends is currently the most important source of information about consumer electronics, according to the survey. That was followed by professional installers, with builders in third place. Builders were cited by only 6 percent of consumers surveyed as the initial source of information for home theaters and by 14 percent for structured wiring.

The association's fourth annual State of the Builder Tech Market Study, conducted online among 379 builders, indicated a clear upward trend in the revenue implications of home tech. Thirty-three percent of builders who participated in the survey said their revenue from home technology products had increased in 2005, up 24 percent from the prior year. In 2004, 83 percent of builders were offering structured wiring to their buyers and that dropped to 82 percent one year later, with half of them offering it as a standard feature and the other half as an option. Structured wiring panels were developed as a means to centralize and organize the miles of cables and individual system panels required to distribute multi-room TV, camera video, phone service, multi-room audio, and PC network and Internet services to each room in a home.

Energy management

"We went nearly 100 years without changing specifications for electrical systems for residential building," says Eric Bates, CEO of Smart House Home Theater. "Then in the '80s, a group of homebuilder associations looked into what changes were needed. So this development is fairly recent. It's become more of a necessity now because we have waited so long to change anything we were doing in wiring."

Smart House specializes in the installation of wiring packages to include whole-house control systems, security, Internet, media communications and whole-house audio. Energy management control systems are a key part of the current trend, according to Bates.

"My clients are stressing the importance of energy control management and lighting management," he notes. "We've seen a big surge in natural-gas tankless water heaters. I've also noticed a trend toward whole-house backup systems with natural-gas generators."

The CEA surveys also showed there are far higher percentages of consumers, and especially short-term prospective buyers, indicating interest in installing high-tech products in their homes than there were builders actually installing them, indicating an opportunity for some builders to boost their sales.

Bob Lunceford, president and CEO of Bob Lunceford Properties in Georgia, cites increased consumer awareness and demand as drivers of the burgeoning high-tech trend. "Suddenly now, as our market has become





more sophisticated, they are starting to ask for more and more things like controlled lighting, energy-efficient programmable thermostats and computer controlled thermostats. We see folks now who like to control from their office what is going on at home, using their personal computers.”

Old-fashioned competition between builders is another factor impacting the trend, according to Lunceford. “It’s very much market driven. If a particular market or group begins updating their electronics packages or information packages, then other builders in the community are forced to do that in order to stay competitive.”

Energy-efficient gas

Lunceford points to energy-efficient gas appliances as being compatible with the high tech, high efficiencies that many buyers appreciate. “In recent years we’ve moved up to higher efficiency furnaces which burn less gas,” he says. “Gas is a very dependable, clean fuel, and we’ve seen a lot of calls for other gas appliances as well, not just in heating and cooking.”

New “smart” water heaters are gaining popularity as well, according to Lunceford. Unlike older models that heat water continuously in holding tanks, new on-demand or tankless natural-gas water heaters deliver hot water instantly only when it is called for by turning on a faucet.

“So rather than having 50 gallons of water that you maintain continually, keeping it hot even when you’re not home, the on-demand heats only the water you are using,” he explains. “The efficiency level is incredibly higher than the tank system. We already offer it as one of our standard upgrades, and I see us probably converting it to a standard feature over the next couple of years.”

Other energy-saving ideas such as floor insulation and thermal pane windows are growing in popularity. More consumers are also becoming aware of the benefits of programmable thermostats, which enable users to

cycle their heating and air conditioning up and down based on usage.

“We strongly recommend them. As more people start using programmable thermostats, they will find they provide great energy savings because you can program the comfort level of your house around the activity that’s going on in the house,” explains Lunceford. “In

the winter, your heat comes on just prior to your getting home and turns off just after you leave. Or it cycles down so you don’t keep the home at a comfort level you don’t really need while no one is there. That’s a huge energy savings.” 🏠

Natural-gas infrared heaters – high-tech and high efficiency

New radiant heaters generate heat in the same way the sun warms the earth, quickly warming people and objects before heating the air.



Unlike traditional heating systems, radiant or infrared heating equipment is designed to provide quiet, energy-efficient, comfort-level temperatures through application of radiant heat transfer.

Radiant heat transfer means that heated infrared rays are radiated until they are absorbed by objects such as floors, equipment, even people. The air immediately surrounding the “heated” objects is warmed because of the increase in temperature of those objects. This makes infrared heating ideal for spot heating applications such as garages, parking ramps and other indoor locations where heat is needed in only a specific area. Not only are natural-gas infrared heaters cost-efficient, but they’re also energy-efficient, running at 80 percent in combustion efficiency tests.

“Energy efficiency” moving up the list

People wanting to buy a new home — or remodel their current one — are making energy efficiency a higher priority than ever before.

BY ELIZABETH E. ANTHONY

It’s a trend that cannot be ignored: more homebuyers are looking to their builder or remodeler to make “energy efficiency” part of the construction plans. Just as consumers have changed the way they buy a new car, so, too, are home shopping and remodeling expectations evolving.

“When customers are building or remodeling, that’s the time they’re thinking about how to save energy,” says Lou Dittmar, owner of Residential Remodeling and Renovations in Chattanooga, Tenn. “Some customers are looking at new technology themselves and demanding it when they plan on updating their homes.” Dittmar gives an example: his first experience with a tankless natural-gas water heater was when a customer requested it.

Consumers want energy-efficient homes — and not just to save money, take advantage of a government incentive, or increase the home’s resale value. Clark Atwood, vice president of Baker Residential in New Jersey reports, “People ask, ‘Are you using high-efficiency equipment? Are you using natural-gas logs?’ People want fireplaces but they don’t want to smoke up the environment by burning wood.”

Energy-efficient features play a bigger role in home building and remodeling every year. Last year saw a 20 percent increase in the number of green homebuilders, according to a survey by National Association of Home Builders and McGraw Hill Construction.

About a year ago, Tony Perry, the 1999 Atlanta Homebuilder of the Year and founder of Oakwood Homes, decided to become an EarthCraft homebuilder, a green building program. “There was some peer pressure to do it because others were building these energy-efficient homes,” Perry said. “I investigated it and was very impressed. And the response from consumers has been overwhelming.”

Even builders and remodelers who are not green homebuilders can

learn more about energy-efficiency and thus gain a marketing edge.

“I love to find new ideas that will improve energy efficiency,” says John Olivieri of Associated Development Management Corp., Virginia Beach, Va. “I read, do research, go to the shows, and talk to other builders. People expect their homebuilder to know what’s new and what works.”

Strides in reducing heating costs

Total energy consumption is projected to increase 1.5 percent annually until 2020, according to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). Energy conservation is definitely on consumers’ minds, and builders and remodelers are adapting new attitudes toward the products they’re selecting.

Heating and cooling a home drains more energy dollars than any other system, typically about 45 percent of the utility bill. Builders including natural-gas heat are making sure their homebuyers are comfortable year after year — not only in their homes, but also with their utility bill.

“Natural-gas heat means you can heat up your house in a shorter period of time,” says James Anderson, owner of Anderson Construction in Tennessee. “You can be gone all day, with the thermostat low, and come



home and heat the house up in no time with good warm heat. Heat pumps can't do that."

Since the typical home loses more than 25 percent of its heat through windows, the Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Clearinghouse recommends that the window area should not exceed 8 to 10 percent of the floor area. In general, the best sealing windows are awning and casement styles since they close tighter.

Smart builders are including house wraps that produce a breathable, weather-resistant barrier that reduces energy consumption and prevents wind-driven rain from entering. "Recommending a house wrap sets you above others who are not recommending it," says Dittmar.

Foam blow-in insulation is also getting attention. "We use Icynene®, a soft-foam cell product that makes your house an Igloo cooler," says Atlanta builder Tony Perry, an Atlanta builder.

Icynene, a soft foam insulation and air barrier system with pour and spray formulations, creates a complete insulation and air barrier system to seal gaps and crevices that compromise air-tightness. It allows for HVAC equipment rightsizing, thereby delivering energy savings of up to 50 percent versus traditional insulation options, the manufacturer states.

Saving a little, saving a lot

Builders and remodelers offer homeowners many ways to save energy. For instance, a natural-gas range, according to the DOE, is more efficient than a similar electric range. "People are looking for efficient appliances that do the same job but cost less to operate," says Dittmar.

A revolution is happening in water heating. A tankless, natural-gas, hot-water system supplies endless streams of hot water on demand, at about a rate of 8.5 gallons per minute to multiple outlets simultaneously, then shuts off automatically when the tap is closed.



A natural-gas fireplace adds ambience and warmth to any room.

Builders including natural-gas heat are making sure their homebuyers are comfortable year after year - not only in their homes, but also with their utility bill.

According to the DOE, for homes that use 41 gallons or less of hot water daily, demand water heaters can be 24 percent to 34 percent more energy-efficient than conventional storage tank water heaters.

Perry says Oakwood Homes is using natural-gas tankless water heaters made by Rinnai. "They are fabulous," he says. "Plus, we have it in our own home. As a builder and a consumer, I can say it's just the coolest product."

Natural-gas fireplaces not only eliminate the mess but also offer cozy savings. Many gas fireplaces are tested and certified to room-heater or wall-furnace standards, which ensure a higher level of efficiency and BTU output. In fact, many are 80 percent more efficient.

Outdoors, natural gas gives homeowners a more manageable bill. Natural-gas heaters are the least expensive way to heat a pool or spa. Plus, creating an outdoor kitchen enables the homeowners to enjoy the outdoors and turn off the house air conditioning.

David Barin, president of the Florida Space Coast Division of Mercedes Homes, says that natural gas especially plays a role in the critical second and third visits that a home shopper makes. "It's when you have an interested prospect who is on the fence a bit that you start to throw in some secondary levels of features such as natural gas," he says. "Offering natural gas can sway the buyer."

"Consumers have to care more about energy efficiency today, because the costs have gone up," Perry says. "If you have an energy-efficient car and an energy-efficient house, you're doing the best you can." 🏠

Listening skills

Paying careful attention to a changing marketplace keeps Peachtree Residential Properties one of Atlanta's premier builders.

BY JANE SCHREIER JONES



Panoramic views and two-story rooms add drama to any home.

Listening – really listening – to what customers say about their wants, needs and lifestyles is a continual process, and success comes to builders who do exactly that. Such careful listening is one of the big reasons why Peachtree Residential Properties keeps its distinguished place as a premier builder in the Greater Atlanta market, and it has earned the company the reputation as “the builder that listens.”

No doubt, it's a changing marketplace to which Peachtree Residential must respond. “The market we serve has become more diverse,” points out Mike Ruland, chief operating officer of Peachtree Residential, headquartered in Suwanee, Georgia. “The age spread has definitely widened, with not only younger families and luxury move-up buyers purchasing our homes, but also more empty-nesters as well.”

Ruland says that in addition to a widening age spread, the expectations of homebuyers have become more intense. “There has been an increased sophistication level of our buyers, particularly due to the widespread use of the Internet,” he says. “Purchasers do their homework, know their options, and know what they want when they come in to our sales offices.”

Founded in 1988, Peachtree Residential builds homes only in the most desirable locations in Cobb, Forsyth, Gwinnett, Dekalb and Fulton counties. The company enjoys an ever-upward sales curve. “The biggest key to our success is our integrity as a company,” Ruland says. “We hold customer satisfaction in the highest regard as a company value, and thus have a tremendous number of repeat buyers as well as referrals.”

“Peachtree tailor”

The company offers creative, well-designed floor plans that lead home shoppers to become homebuyers. “Plus, we work with our buyers to ‘Peachtree tailor’ each home to the family that will live in it,” Ruland says. That habit of satisfying homeowners has made Peachtree Residential one of the most success Certified Professional Home Builders in the Southeast.

Development is currently underway at St. Michaels Bay, a new gated community in Forsyth County adjacent to Lake Lanier. Set among a hardwood forest with 7,000 feet of shoreline protected by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers, St. Michaels Bay will include 128 homes priced from the \$400,000s. Homesites are heavily wooded and secluded, averaging half an acre in size.

“The Brevard, our model home at St. Michaels Bay, is a great example of what we do, because it's a true masterpiece,” says Kathleen Murphy, director of marketing for Peachtree Residential. The Brevard model, with a two-story family room, five bedrooms, four and a half baths, full basement and a finished third floor also includes a multilevel deck with panoramic views of Lake Lanier.

Style and functionality attract homebuyers.

Homebuyers are impressed with the features and innovations found in the Brevard's gourmet kitchen, complete with consumer-appealing, natural-gas appliances. "For a multitude of reasons, including better temperature control while cooking, natural gas is definitely the energy source of choice for any gourmet kitchen," Murphy reports.

She's right. Gourmet chefs and everyday cooks prefer cooking with natural gas. It's the fuel choice for nine out of 10 chefs who appreciate the even heating, excellent temperature control and instant on-off settings for cooking and baking.

Tennis anyone?

Peachtree Residential is also making its presence known in a swim and tennis community known as The Hampshires in northwest Fulton County. "The Hampshires offers everything a family-friendly community should," says Murphy with enthusiasm. "The elegant homes sit on large wooded home sites, and owners will enjoy using all of the amenities, which include a pool, tennis courts and playground."

The traditional two-story homes at The Hampshires range in size from 3,200 to 4,200 square feet. Homeowners can choose from 10 different floor plans, with basement and side-entry garages, ranging from the low \$600,000s to the \$800,000s.

Peachtree Residential has constructed The Brunswick model to show potential buyers the quality of life available in The Hampshires. A look at the many "today's living" features shows exactly how Peachtree Residential listens to homebuyers. The home's large kitchen overlooks a keeping room with a natural-gas fireplace. In addition, a computer room or "command center" with built-in bookcases off the kitchen provides a convenient place for kids to study or parents to keep their mail, schedules and other paperwork organized.

Another design feature that shows how Peachtree Residential understands busy families is the children's area in the three-car garage, where books, coats and shoes can be stored.

Homeowners at The Hampshires will be able to enjoy the benefits of natural-gas lifestyle, which Ruland says is especially important with upscale buyers. "In our experience, natural gas is the preferred vehicle for energy in the southeast and the Atlanta market in particular," he says. "It's what our



market's sophisticated luxury buyers have come to prefer."

The reliability of natural gas gives extra benefits that Peachtree Residential wants to offer. "We use natural gas in our homes because it's efficient as well as reliable when compared to other home energy options," Murphy says. "For example, our homeowners have peace of mind knowing that if their power goes out, they will still have hot water and warmth from their natural-gas fireplaces."

Staying in tune to consumers' preference for natural gas and other elements of comfortable home life is a smart strategy for the Peachtree Residential management and marketing team. "Peachtree Residential has changed by continually improving the company as a whole; however, our core values and mission statement have remained the same," Ruland says. "Complete customer satisfaction and unsurpassed quality are still our top priorities."

Ruland is enthusiastic about being a homebuilder in today's market. "Absolutely, this is a great time to be in the homebuilding business, particularly in the Atlanta market and in the sought-after locations we build in," he says. "Our plans for the future are to continue to improve as a company with respect to our product, systems and processes, resulting in even higher levels of customer satisfaction." 🏠

HBAG 2006 AWARD WINNERS

During the 2006 HBAG Convention in Puerto Rico, these individuals were selected and honored by the Home Builders Association of Georgia for their service, leadership and dedication to the Association.



2006
Executive Officer of the Year Award
Presented to **Andrea Hammond**, HBA of
Newton County



2006
Builder Member of the Year Award
Presented to **Tim Williams**,
HBA of Gainesville/Hall County



2006
Builder Member of the Year Award
Presented to **Allen Richardson**, Greater
Atlanta HBA



2006
Home Builders Association of Georgia
Presidential Award
Presented to **Suzanne Williams**,
Vice President Government Affairs, HBAG



2006
Home Builders Association of Georgia
Presidential Award
Presented to **Tyler Newman**, Regulatory
Affairs Director, HBAG



2006
Home Builders Association of Georgia
Presidential Award
Presented to **Gene Barber**,
HBA of Midwest Georgia

AGL's Flowers, Guice honored



Randy Flowers, senior account executive for AGL, recently was awarded his "life spike" for recruiting 25 members to the Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association. Randy is active in the Home Builders Association of Georgia and is on the Cobb Executive Board, as well as the Membership Committee for GAHBA.



AGL's **Merrill Guice**, account executive - South Georgia AGL, was presented the Leadership Award for the Homebuilders Association of South Georgia, Valdosta Chapter. The award recognizes outstanding leadership on association committees. Merrill serves as Advertising Chair for the Annual Home Show committee and is Co-Chair of the Communications Committee.



AGL Resources Names Donna Peeples Vice President of Marketing

Donna Peeples, the woman behind AGL Resources' recent successful marketing campaigns, has been promoted to vice president of Marketing. Peeples, with more than 20 years of energy- and industry-related experience, has spearheaded award-winning advertising and marketing campaigns for Atlanta Gas Light and other AGL Resources subsidiaries, including an Emmy-winning television commercial.

Peeples had served as managing director of Sales and Marketing at AGL Resources since 2004. In her new role, she will oversee a comprehensive and integrated marketing, sales and sales fulfillment strategy for all of AGL Resources' utility franchises. She also will lead the effort to further align the marketing, sales and brand management efforts across AGL Resources' six utilities.

Under Peeples' leadership, the AGL Resources utilities have seen an increase in their new-home markets as discriminating homebuyers increasingly ask for natural-gas appliances.

Peeples earned a degree in management from Troy University. She is active in Habitat for Humanity, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, and Project Open Hand.

Three others promoted at AGL Resources

Corey Minshev
Director of Sales, Southern Operations



Minshev oversees strategic growth of sales for Tennessee, Georgia and Florida. He is responsible for the implementation of marketing programs to increase market share and market penetration in both residential and commercial markets. Common goals and metrics will be an important piece of standardizing the sales effort across Southern Operations. Minshev also will be responsible for equipping the sales teams with tools to enhance their efforts.

A native of Rome, Ga., he graduated from Shorter College with a bachelor of science degree in business administration and has worked 23 years with Atlanta Gas Light Company.

Gary W. Sanchez
Director, Key Accounts & Wholesale Services



Sanchez manages a team of senior account executives who serve national builders within the AGL franchise territory. His goal is to increase the use of safe, reliable natural gas in single-family and high-density housing developments. Sanchez also manages the team of account executives serving AGL Resources' top industrial and interruptible customers in Florida, Georgia and Tennessee markets.

Sanchez, who grew up in Colorado, graduated from the University of Idaho with a bachelor of science in business finance. He earned an MBA from Mercer University in 2000.

John M. Cogburn
Manager, Marketer Services



As Manager, Marketer Services for AGL, Cogburn is responsible for managing the relationship between AGL and the natural-gas marketers in Georgia, where the consumer natural-gas market is deregulated. He joined AGL Resources' regulatory department as an analyst in March 2004; in October 2005 he was named manager of regulatory planning and policy.

Cogburn, a native of Griffin, Ga., graduated from Elon College with a bachelor of arts in economics. He earned a masters in economics from the University of Tennessee.

Merkel newest addition to AGL team

Yvonne A. Merkel
Director, Marketing Operations and Brand Implementation

Merkel recently joined the AGL team to work with the company's advertising agency on brand/product development and communications strategy. She also coordinates with teams from Sales, Construction and AGL Resources subsidiaries such as Atlanta Gas Light and Elizabethtown Gas on marketing campaigns and promotions. Merkel also oversees strategic partnerships and sponsorship initiatives.

Before joining AGL Resources, she was an Atlanta-based consultant who helped clients develop and execute marketing and communications strategies as well as event marketing programs. Merkel's experience also includes 10 years at MCI Inc., where she held a variety of leadership positions.

Merkel, a Virginia native, received a bachelor of arts in rhetoric and communications studies from the University of Virginia. She is a member of the American Marketing Association.



Add color, interest to kitchens with retro appliances



Are you getting bored with the same old white, chrome or black appliances in your kitchens? Ready to put a little color back in one of the most popular rooms in any house?

Elmira Stove Works has introduced two new lines of retro appliances – one with all the warmth and elegance of the 19th Century and another featuring the fun colors and funky looks of the “Fab Fifties.” Regardless of which vintage style you prefer, all appliances are loaded with 21st Century technology.

Northstar ranges feature self-cleaning ovens, sealed gas burners, optional warming drawers, and can be paired with matching vent hoods. Colors range from Candy Red to Flamingo Pink, Mint Green and Robin’s Egg Blue.

For more information, go to www.elmireastoveworks.com or call 1-800-295-8498.



The 411

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www.google.com/alerts

Google Alerts are email updates of the latest relevant Google results (web, news, etc.) on the subjects of your choice. It’s a great way to keep current on competitors, your industry or developing news stories.



www.termite.com

This consumer Web site about termites and termite control features state-by-state updates on infestation, control systems and consumer

protection. Learn how to protect yourselves and provide assurance for your clients.



www.freddiemac.com/homebuyers

This site will be especially helpful for first-time homebuyers. It explains the benefits, as well as the additional responsibilities, of homeownership. Buyers can research mortgages, sift through the myths vs. facts of owning a home, understand closing costs and down payments, and much more.



www.buygasappliances.com

This site will give you information on the newest natural gas products available, such as gas lights, lanterns, grills, ranges, water heaters and more. Plus, natural gas experts can answer your questions via phone or e-mail to help you choose the perfect product for your needs. It’s rare to find such a wide selection of natural gas appliances in one place.

PEARL can be a life saver

Each year more than 4,000 people die in residential fires and another 20,000 are severely burned. According to the National Fire Protection Association, a person has approximately 30 seconds to decide on an escape during a fire.

Today builders can help lower those numbers and add value to a house by including home safety devices. One such device is PEARL – a Permanent Escape And Rescue Ladder – that was recently featured on the hit ABC television show, “Extreme Makeover.” PEARL can be quickly and easily deployed in the event of a home emergency. Homebuilders install PEARL into the interior wall space beneath second- or third-story windows, or it can be installed into an existing house. PEARL features a paint-grade access door to blend well with existing décor.

Because it is permanently installed, escape is as simple as opening the window, throwing out the ladder and descending. In fact, “Open, Throw and Go” is the company’s slogan. PEARL Protected says this is the strongest escape and rescue ladder on the market, supporting up to 1,500 pounds.

PEARL requires a finished space of 14 in. (h) x 16.5 in. (w). There are no special framing requirements other than centering the (16-inch centered) jack studs under the window.

The company likens the device to installing an airbag in an auto and says offering this secondary escape option reflects a growing trend of homebuilder responsibility.

Suggested retail price is \$429 per unit.

More information can be found on the company’s Web site, www.pearlprotected.com.



Free-standing, natural-gas stoves warm and inspire

Few heating options have the charm and history of free-standing stoves. Many great conversations (and as many tall tales) have shared by people gathered 'round these cast-iron heaters.

The new Harman FireLuxe natural-gas stove combines old charm with modern luxury and functionality. The Harman stove features elegant cast-iron details, extraordinary log design, and an exclusive cooktop burner for cooking or simply making tea. And safe, clean-burning natural gas provides comfortable heat for any season.

For more information, go to www.harmanstoves.com or call (717) 362-9080





Accommodation

Building and remodeling for the disabled makes good sense for everyone.

BY JACK MCGEE

As the numbers of aging Baby Boomers continue to increase in proportion to the general population, home builders are finding new ways to accommodate their needs. Seniors, as well as disabled veterans and others with physical impairments, require certain access and other structural features that, once embraced by builders, are proving to be both popular and profitable.

EasyLiving Home™ is a voluntary program that encourages easy access to homes for everyone. The organization is the nation's first voluntary certification program that specifies criteria to make new homes more hospitable to persons who are in wheelchairs or who are otherwise physically impaired. The program was developed by a coalition of public and private organizations to encourage the voluntary inclusion of key features which make a home cost effective, accessible and convenient without sacrificing style or adding substantial construction costs.

This program represents the most successful attempt so far to promote change in construction practices without adversely affecting either the builder or the new home buyer. The goal is ambitious: to change the way people think by increasing convenience, safety and inclusion in homes. According to the organization, EasyLiving Home™ certification can enhance both the initial and resale value of a home and can be achieved for

practically any home, regardless of price, building site or architecture.

O'Dwyer Homes, a premier Atlanta builder, has embraced the EasyLiving program. The company's stated goal is to design and deliver quality family living with appealing features and custom touches. The builder has been able to successfully tie the EasyLiving concept into its overall approach.

"We basically have two different product types," explains President Dan O'Dwyer. "We have traditional single-family products all over Atlanta. And currently we have three active adult living concepts offering single-story ranch villas targeted to this market. Eventually I envision that 50 percent to 60 percent of my products will be active-adult villa product that will incorporate the EasyLiving design.

"Our Villa product is targeted toward active adults," adds O'Dwyer. "In that age group, you deal with a certain percentage who are disabled. Following the established EasyLiving standards, plus a couple other things that we do, allows us to not only design a home that fits peoples' standards when they are young, but as they mature and begin to encounter some disabilities, they can live in place and not have to remodel their homes or move."

O'Dwyer says that designing homes to meet the changing needs of individuals is really a matter of adhering to basic standards of good design. "Not all builders have elected to do it. It involves redesign of your house plan to be able to incorporate wider hallways and wider doors. Fortunately, we have an in-house architect who designs all our plans, so it's been easier for us to make the transition."

Easy does it

There are three main aspects to the EasyLiving concept. Easy access involves a step-free entrance into the central living area of the home from a driveway or sidewalk, or a firm route into the main floor for family and friends who rely on crutches, walkers or wheelchairs for mobility. Easy access also offers greater convenience for anyone whose arms are full of shopping bags or small children, as well as easy transport of luggage carriers, strollers and other cumbersome objects.

Easy passage includes ample room to pass through doorways on the main floor, including complete access to all the necessary living spaces. This feature offers greater independence for family members unable to fit through narrow spaces or climb stairs. But the benefits extend beyond accommodating the impaired. Anyone can pass freely around the main floor even when carrying bulky items such as laundry baskets.

Easy use provides bedrooms, kitchens, entertainment areas and full bathrooms with sufficient maneuvering space for a wheelchair on the main floor accessible via the step-free entrance. This feature allows for fewer trips up and down the stairs since the rooms that residents spend most of their time in are all on one level. And as years pass, a self-contained main floor

with accessible bathroom makes it possible for people who develop serious medical conditions to remain at home and retain their independence.

Step-free thresholds, three-foot-wide hallways and wider door openings are some of the main features that, when built into the structure, allow those who live in it to be able to age in place, according to O'Dwyer. He notes that that one of the most in-demand features is no-step entry into the house.

The company's stated goal is to design and deliver quality family living with appealing features and custom touches.



"We design the home so there is no-step entry at either the front door or the garage. That allows anyone in a wheelchair to enter and exit the home without a lot of problems. The central design of the home has to be accessible from a wheelchair perspective also, with wider hallways for example."

O'Dwyer says that energy efficient natural-gas appliances conform to the EasyLiving approach. "If you care enough to incorporate design trends into the home that allow buyers to age in place gracefully, then you probably care enough to incorporate energy-efficient design into the product also."

Accommodating veterans

The needs of disabled veterans are another major consideration of the new design trend. The NAHB Remodelers™ Council staff worked with the U.S. Department of Veteran's Affairs on the VA's Specially Adapted Housing offers disabled veterans funds to build or modify an accessible home. The grant covers 50 percent of the housing expenses.

The council's Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS) designation teaches how to make housing accessible, offering the VA a pool of builders and remodelers with the expertise to meet the needs of disabled veterans, and explores ways the VA can work with local home builders associations. The Home Improvement and Structural Alterations (HISA) program, through the Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service (Veterans Health Administration), provides a \$4,100 grant to make modifications to the veteran's home related to ongoing medical treatment.

Builders interested in working with the VA on the Specially Adapted Housing grant program can contact their area VA housing agent. For more information contact Jim Lapidés at NAHB (800-368-5242 ext. 8451) or visit the Web sites listed below.

- Independent Living Program (ILP)
www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/ilp.htm
- VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service
www.vba.va.gov/bln/vre/vrs.htm
- Prosthetics & Sensory Aids Service (Veterans Health Administration)
www1.va.gov/visns/visn02/dt/prosthetics.html



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