

Building Scene

Marilyn Fitchett editor/591-2300



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Builder uses energy saving as sales tool

By Doug Funke
staff writer

Robert Snowden, a West Bloomfield developer trying to break into the business, figures that he has to use every available marketing tool to compete with the big boys and attract customers.

So he's decided to add energy-efficient touches to pre-engineered modular houses he customizes on scattered lots in the metropolitan area.

Touches like storm doors on the front door, 3 1/2 inches of extra insulation between floors, 14 1/2 inches of insulation in the roof and two thermostats on the furnace — one for the second floor, the other for the first.

Snowden, president of the fledgling Ashley Development Co., recently was recognized by Consumers Power for exceeding standards set by the utility's energy efficient home award program.

"For me, the energy package is standard because I believe in making an energy efficient home," Snowden said of models offered by General Housing of Bay City.

"If we're going to become energy independent, we're going to have to pay attention to these things," he said.

A modular house is completely built at a factory and then transported to a lot where its major sections are put together.

Snowden, 34, designed and installed two bedrooms and a full bathroom upstairs and roughed in a bonus room over the garage at the Williamsburg Cape Cod model in the Pleasant Lake Highland Subdivision

of West Bloomfield. He put skylights in the upstairs bath and master bedroom.

The main floor — two bedrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom and laundry — is 1,120 square feet.

A small Vaillant model, gas-fired boiler furnace in the basement is rated at 85-percent efficiency, Snowden said.

The house is listed at \$126,500 and includes the lot. The model alone would sell for about \$90,000 with an unfinished upstairs, Snowden said.

BUYERS DON'T seem to be as fussy about energy-saving elements in a house today as they were a decade ago, Snowden said.

"In 1979-80-81, buyers were more energy conscious when the price of energy jumped about 50 percent," he said. "Prices have stabilized, maybe fallen, and they're not paying as much consideration."

"I think they will be in for a nasty surprise in a few years when they (prices) take off again," Snowden said.

Jim White, a marketing consultant for Consumers Power, agrees with Snowden, but believes that energy again is becoming important to buyers.

"I think people realize we've seen some relief (on prices) in the short term," White said. "In the long-term, energy is going to be an important resource to manage."

A study by the National Association of Home Builders indicates that 70 percent of new home buyers rank energy efficiency high on a list of the most important con-



JOHN STORMZ/Staff photographer

This Williamsburg Cape Cod in the Pleasant Lake Highland Subdivision of West Bloomfield was recognized by Consumers

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siderations when building a new home.

BUILDERS ARE responding, said James S. Bonadeo, president of the Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan.

From the roof to the basement, new home buyers will find the very latest in construction and materials to make their homes more comfortable, more convenient and less expensive to live in," he said.

More insulation, more-efficient window glazings and more-efficient furnaces and water heaters have resulted.

Everyone wins with the home energy award program sponsored by Consumers Power, White said.

The utility gets another natural gas customer, the buyer gets more bang for his energy dollar and the builder can promote and advertise a house as energy-efficient.

Other builders honored or soon to be honored by Consumers are LePore Building of Troy, Hillcom Development of Bloomfield Hills and Multi Building of Plymouth, White said.

TO QUALIFY, ceiling insulation

must be rated at least R-38 and wall insulation R-19, White said. The higher the rating, the greater the efficiency and protection.

Snowden said he has R-44 in the ceiling, R-19 in the walls and an additional 13 1/2 inches of insulation with a rating of R-45 in the roof.

Award-winning houses also must be completely weatherstripped and caulked, the windows must be double-glazed or contain storms and the furnace and hot water heater must be rated at least 80 percent efficient.

The windows used by Snowden

have storms and reflect heat out in summer and reflect heat in during winter, he said.

"Hot-water baseboard heat is quiet, it's even and it's efficient," he added.

The dual thermostats on the furnace — one for the second floor, the other for the first — also save energy, Snowden said.

The Williamsburg in West Bloomfield remains unsold in spite of the energy strategy taken by Snowden. The big drawback is the nearly mile trek on an unpaved road up Halsted from 14 Mile, he said.

Appliances cut energy use

(AP) — Consumers can save close to \$160 a year by using the most energy efficient appliances sold in the United States, according to a independent non-profit energy research group.

"There are many factors that consumers need to look at in purchasing appliances. Energy is one of them," said Steve Nadel, senior associate at the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy.

Because "one-third of the electricity produced in the U.S. is consumed in our homes" the council recommends consumers pay closer attention to the yellow EnergyGuide labels affixed to new appliances.

"We are suggesting that people narrow their searches," Nadel said. The group's guide, "The Most Energy-Efficient Appliances" offers consumers help in doing that.

"If all the households in the U.S. had the most efficient refrigerators currently available, the electricity savings would eliminate the need for about 10 large power plants," the report said.

The makes and models surveyed by the council meet or exceed the minimum efficiency standards established by the National Appliance Energy Conservation Act of 1987, Nadel added.

The law provides that minimum energy efficiency standards for major home appliances be reduced by 10 percent to 30 percent and phased in over five years.

"Using appliances and heating and cooling equipment costs an average household more than \$1,000 per year," the report said.

"We estimate that these standards will save consumers at least \$28 billion over the lifetimes of the products sold through the year 2000," the report concluded.

BUT NADEL estimated buying the council's most energy-efficient refrigerator, dish and clothes washer could save \$146 a year.

The average family refrigerator is 18.5 cubic feet refrigerators with top freezers and automatic defrosters, Nadel said. The council report rates a Frigidaire 18.6 cubic foot model as the most efficient in that size category. Based on a national average energy cost of 7.7 cents per kilowatt hour the booklet estimates the annual cost to run the Frigidaire refrigerator at \$65 annually.

The average refrigerator that consumers replace costs about \$112 to operate yearly, said Nadel. He calculated that consumers would save \$47 a year with the Frigidaire model.

For two other common household appliances, dish and clothes washers, Nadel estimated yearly costs for existing models in most homes at \$70 and \$90 respectively.

The council rates a White-Westinghouse dishwasher which costs \$28 a year to operate and a Gibson front-loading standard size washing machine costing \$23 a year to run as the most energy-efficient new models. The consumer buying these would save \$32 and \$67 over current costs.

Consumers can obtain a copy of the council's guide for \$3 by writing ACEEE, Suite 535, 1001 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036.

Avoid problems before they arise

Our project is about 15 years old. The president of the association, having read your column, has requested that we amend our bylaws. Several members of the board are concerned that an update of the bylaws would be expensive and not necessary particularly since "we've not had any problems over the years." Their philosophy is why change it if it has worked. Do you have any comments?

A: If the condominium project is 15 years old without any bylaw changes, it is clear that you have not taken advantage of major changes in the 1978 Condominium Act, which enhanced condominium association operation, as well as other changes to the act that took place in 1983 and thereafter. Moreover, 15 years of experience in condo operation have not been incorporated into your condominium documents. As one of the co-drafters of the 1978 Condominium Act, it was my desire to alleviate many of the problems or abuses that took place under the first generation of condominium documents and the first-generation condominium statute. Unless you incorporate the changes in the documents, they will not be applicable. Also the fact that you have allegedly not had any problems up to this point is totally irrelevant to the question of the need to update your condo documents. The idea of having good condominium documents, which are specific in regard to restrictions, etc., is to avoid problems before they arise to be able to deal with them effectively once they arise, including, if necessary, the commencement of successful legal proceedings to ensure compliance with the condominium documents. Get your condo lawyer to address the members of the board of directors or the members of the association as to the need to update your documents as soon as possible.

We are upset about the election procedure of our condominium association regarding a recent attempt to remove the directors. All of a sudden the board decided that they would strictly adhere to the requirements that only the designated voting representative could vote when, in the past, that was not their custom or procedure. We protested at the meeting,



condo queries
Robert M. Meisner

but they basically did it their own way. What can we do since we want to throw the directors out? Unfortunately, we were not represented.

A: The board of directors of your association cannot have their cake and eat it too. If in fact they were elected under a procedure by which they did not follow their own rules and regulations regarding the designated voter representative forum, but then decided to get smart in an effort to make it more difficult for them to be unseated, you more than likely have a good claim that they have not been managing the association properly and have abused the election process. It is also more than likely that there may be other irregularities in regard to the election process, which should be reviewed by a competent legal adviser who is familiar with condominium association election procedures. You may find that you have a basis to set aside either the original election of the directors or the apparent election removal procedure, which you claim was fraught with error.

Robert M. Meisner is a Birmingham attorney specializing in condominiums, real estate and corporate law. You are invited to submit topics, which you would like to see discussed in this column, including questions about condominiums, by writing Robert M. Meisner, 30200 Telegraph Road, Suite 407, Birmingham 48010. This column provides general information and should not be construed as legal opinion.

This Land Is Your Land

Void In West Bloomfield

On October 16, 1989 the West Bloomfield Township Board may pass an ordinance to restrict the reasonable use of your property. This Ordinance would require you to provide an extensive surveying and engineering study of your property and even force you to submit to a public hearing if you wish to relocate or remove even one small 3" caliper tree which you planted a few years ago. Do you want Government to take away control of your property? Can you afford more tax increases or a decrease in your property value? Protect your largest investment. Attend the October 16th meeting at 7:00 pm in the new Township Building located at 4550 Walnut Lake Road. Let your voice be heard before your land becomes their land.

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