

Building Scene

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Smart House nears reality

By Doug Funke
staff writer

A Troy builder figures that smart buyers who can afford it will want to live in a brand new Smart House at some point in their lives.

And Donald L. Pratt, president of Wake-Pratt in Troy, doesn't want to wait 10 or 15 years for demand to catch up with the technology.

Pratt intends to build a demonstration model now to showcase the innovative wiring system that can provide automatic activation of home appliances, utilities and security systems.

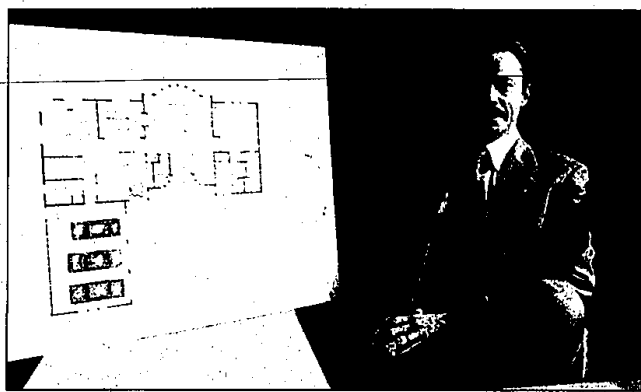
Groundbreaking at an Oakland Township site is planned for this month or next, the grand opening for May.

"I think people are looking for ways of living more comfortably and living a more enjoyable lifestyle," Pratt said. "Yuppies are demanding more than when we were growing up."

Floor plans for Pratt's demonstration model — a story and a half of 3,300 square feet with a lower walkout level — show a living room/family room, dining room, kitchen, half bath, foyer and master suite on the first floor, three bedrooms and two full baths on the second. Plus a three-car garage.

THE WALKOUT area will be used as a presentation center and sales office during the two months that Pratt has exclusive rights to showcase the Smart House in Detroit Edison's service area.

People familiar with Smart House capabilities will be at several spots in the home and in the presentation center to point out special features and answer questions.



Donald L. Pratt, a Troy builder, intends to have the first Smart House demonstration model in the metro area ready by next spring.

Visitors will be able to play with mock systems to get a feel for the concept.

"If they don't understand what they're looking at, touching, feeling, they won't understand what it's all about," Pratt said.

The model will be priced for sale at \$350,000-\$400,000, he said.

Special Smart House wiring, a combination of low-

voltage and traditional electrical lines, provides numerous automating capabilities for a house.

"It integrates in such a way you can control any portion of the house from any other portion," Pratt said.

"This is all done through computers. You can lock doors, monitor the baby's room, turn lights on and off, lock out appliances."

Cable TV and telephone service could be available at

any outlet in the house. Appliances like ovens, microwaves and clothes dryers could be activated from anywhere inside or outside of the house with a push button telephone.

"IT GIVES better opportunity to manage (electrical) usage," said William J. Steele, builder/developer liaison for Detroit Edison.

The basic wiring of a Smart House now costs about \$5,000 more than to wire a house the traditional way, Pratt said. Customers would spend another \$10,000-\$14,000 on controls for specific conveniences they want.

"Eventually, the same thing that happened to calculators will happen to Smart House — it will become more economical after we get all the bugs out," Pratt said.

Progress has been slow but steady. The specialized wiring system took several years to develop. Code approvals were obtained. Only a couple of manufacturers make the wiring now.

Investors in Smart House products are gradually introducing the concept in different parts of the country so that the process goes smoothly.

Pratt, president of the Michigan Association of Home Builders, jumped on the bandwagon about five years ago. His uncle, Ted Pratt, a founder of the building company, was an early investor on the national scene.

"It's not that we want to be pioneers," Don Pratt said. "We believe in it. It's something we feel is going to be used. We want to have the technology to be a front-runner."

Detroit Edison, which has limited exclusive promotional rights to Smart House due to its involvement on the Smart House advisory board, selected Wake-Pratt from among seven area applicants as its builder.

"We looked at number of years as a builder, type of house built, involvement with the national, state and local association," Steele said.

Deck the halls for Homearama; December date set

By Doug Funke
staff writer

The Builders Association of Southeastern Michigan is taking a gamble by scheduling its annual Homearama — a showcase of area homes — for Dec. 6-22.

In previous years, the show has been held in spring or early in the fall. The weather in December can be dicey, and people get busy with school activities.

But organizers say they're anxious to see how visitors respond when walking through 13 new detached

site condominiums decorated for the holidays in the Riverbridge Subdivision of Novi.

"We're just trying different times of the year to see what best fits the public's needs and our needs," said Dennis Dickstein, chairman of Homearama and owner of Ralph

Manuel Associates, Birmingham. "Having it become darker earlier we feel is a benefit — the light of the houses — and holiday decorations will only add to the ambience," he added. "We'll try it. If it doesn't work out, we'll try it at a different time next year."

Dickstein said he's hoping for an attendance of 65,000-75,000.

Some 65,000 turned out last spring for a Homearama in Shelby Township and 50,000 for a fall Homearama in Brighton, a spokesman for the builder's association said.

"THE OVERALL purpose is to promote the building industry and the image builders have... and to let people be aware of innovations and products available," Dickstein said of the show.

All 13 Homearama units are now under construction and on schedule,

said Herbert Lawson, developer of the property.

"We thought it was a unique opportunity to do something really different," he said of the timetable.

"Minneapolis had a successful winter Homearama. We wanted to try it."

"At that time of the year (December), there's not a lot of excitement in building and real estate. We're going to be doing a holiday theme with various decorations. It certainly should be something quite unique," Lawson said.

This year's Homearama will have

another interesting twist.

The builders selected to participate were strongly encouraged to keep their listing prices including construction, lot and landscaping to \$250,000 or less, Lawson said.

Houses in recent Homearamas have exceeded \$500,000.

"WE WANTED to get more into a saleable price range rather than just an elite range," Dickstein said.

"Our site has 55 home sites," Lawson said. "We're surrounded by a river, a creek and a large berm. There are a lot of large trees. It has sort of

an up-north feel to it."

Six of the 10 builders selected for Homearama are in Observer & Eccentric communities.

They include Fairway Construction, Southfield; BHC Group, Farmington Hills; Soave Building Co., Livonia; Michigan Custom-Home Builders Group, Livonia; D&J Property Development, Canton; and Cohen Associates, West Bloomfield.

The other builders are Blom Designers and Builders in Northville; Cornerstone Building Inc., Novi; and Pulse Homes of Michigan, Royal Oak.

Partners split to form separate companies

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

One of the area's most successful longtime residential building teams has gone separate ways.

Nosan/Cohen Associates of West Bloomfield is no more. The replacement companies are Nosan Enterprises and Cohen Associates, both in West Bloomfield.

The parting was amicable. Working in a partnership was both productive and lucrative for the Nosan/Cohen team, but it was also restrictive, both said.

Lawrence Cohen, president of Cohen Associates, said that the idea of going separate ways probably began earlier this year — either late winter or early spring.

They didn't actually split up until near the end of June, after they had worked out how existing projects like Stonebridge in West Bloomfield and Woods of Novi in Novi would be handled.

Other Nosan/Cohen residential projects are Sabie Pointe in West Bloomfield and Maple Woods in Novi. They also built the Novi Professional Village and Maple Park Office Center, also in Novi.

"Everything that we've done together that's in progress, we'll still have a shared interest in," Cohen said. That includes their projects as well as joint ventures with other builders.

"We wanted to make sure people (in earlier projects) won't have to worry about whether we're still going to be here."

Both he and Nosan value their reputations in the building industry and don't want to jeopardize that name — individually or as a building team, he said.

COHEN SAID the two dissolved their partnership because each wished to do different things. "Things won't change much for me," he said.

Cohen Associates in West Bloomfield will focus its energies on production housing much as Nosan/Cohen did. Cohen said. Whether that will include buying and developing property for his own subdivisions or purchasing lots in pre-developed subdivisions will depend on the property.

But production housing isn't all Cohen will be doing.

Cohen has also started a new venture with Great Lakes Prudential vice president Charles Sower. The venture purchases lakefront property and builds homes based on successful Nosan/Cohen models of the past.

The idea is to provide custom quality homes at substantial savings to homeowners — basically bringing the \$1 million lakefront home into the \$500,000 price range.

TERRY NOSAN, president of Nosan Enterprises in West Bloomfield, said that while he enjoyed his time spent as a partner in Nosan/Cohen Associates, the time had come to move on and try different things — things that might not have worked in a partnership.

"Everything that we've done together that's in progress, we'll still have a shared interest in."

— Lawrence Cohen

Things will be much different for Nosan, who is virtually starting from scratch.

"When I left, all I took with me was me."

Nosan said he will be focusing his efforts on custom, more expensive homes where there is more contact between him and the buyer. "That was something I missed (while working with Nosan/Cohen)."

Nosan said that while he and Cohen were accessible to home buyers, most of the customer interaction was handled by sales and construction people.

Now that he's starting over, there will be a lot more one-on-one, hands-on interaction with buyers, brokers and architects.

"I enjoy that sort of thing."

Nosan said he isn't ruling out partnerships in the future, but they will be partnerships for individual projects.

"I like deal partnerships — where you work with another builder, another developer or even a non-builder for one job."

Nosan said he is also interested in a more controlled environment. Under the partnership he wasn't always able to play things as fast and as loose as he hopes he will in the future.

One other area Nosan said he will be exploring is land acquisition, rezoning and development. Once the property is ready, he will sell lots, but it's unlikely he will build subdivision homes for a while. "I might do some site condos that look like houses, but that's about it."

"You could do all this (within the bounds of a partnership), but it's hard to value what your contribution is," he said. While working together, each would come up with ideas for projects that really didn't fit the Nosan/Cohen Associates mold.

That meant not doing projects that the two didn't agree on, he said. "If I had a whim or something he might perceive as a screwy idea — or if he had an idea I didn't agree with — in fairness to the partnership, neither of us could do it."

"Now, I can say, 'Hey, I'll do it anyway,'" he said.

"I'm actually enjoying the idea that I don't have a program," Nosan added. "I think it will be healthy for both of us."

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