

CALVACADE OF HOMES



From the exterior this Hamburg Township home looks like many others in the county, but inside the floor joists and wall studs are of galvanized steel.

Home boasts novelty approach in construction

By DOUG SANDERS

In advance of the real event, Pinckney-based builder Victor Lisabeth has been holding a sort of home cavalcade of his own the last few weeks. Curiosity over a house Lisabeth is building in Hamburg Township has been drawing a steady stream of Livingston County contractors to look over its steel wall studs and floor joists.

It is, Lisabeth said, the first home built in Livingston to substitute galvanized steel for wood in both the joists and the studs. More than just a novelty, he believes the steel alternative is here to stay.

"I know I'm excited as a builder because they won't be coming to me three years from now and saying they have a squeaky floor or a sag or whatever," Lisabeth said in an interview. "There have been at least 20 different builders through here, but that's what it's all about, educating everybody on it."

"Sure, we're competing against each other in the market, but everybody is willing to share information on a good idea that will help everybody."

Part of that help, he said, is in contractors being able to put up walls that stay straight, floors that stay level and drywall with nails that stay snug. In addition, using steel helps builders avoid the hassles brought by today's newgrowth lumber, which is prone to warp-

ing and twisting.

But the differences between the two building materials lay in more than the strength and polish they bring to a finished home. There is a difference in handling and installing the material as well, Lisabeth said.

The steel floor joists are as wide as their 2-by-10-inch wood counterparts, but a welcome departure in thickness and weight. The steel pieces are less than 1/8-inch thick and come in sections 37 feet long a single worker can lift. Nail guns traditionally used to install the wood materials are ineffective with the steel, however, which must be screwed in place.

Lisabeth said steel-supported interior walls are commonplace in commercial buildings, where fire codes demand use of such materials. They only became viable in house construction, he said, when the recent price increases in wood products made steel a more attractive option.

In particular, Lisabeth said, the price of two-by-fours has more than doubled in the last year, while prices for steel studs have remained constant.

"The steel is a little more labor intensive and that makes up for some of the cost," he said. "But when you look at the two of them side-by-side, I guess it's a wash and you still end up with a better product."

Lisabeth said a January visit to a national builders' show in Las Vegas, where he saw a

house entirely framed in steel, convinced him that wood's replacement was at hand. Magazine articles and a company less than an hour away distributing the material have helped round out the picture for him.

Now Lisabeth finds himself playing the role

of committed evangelist, acquainting subcontractors, building inspectors and others about using steel to do what wood used to.

"I always look at it is, if somebody wants to offer you a Cadillac for the same price as a Chevy, you'd be stupid not to take it," he said.



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