

# Manufactured houses are gaining in popularity

PONTIAC, Mich. (AP) — Call them "manufactured" or "modular," but please don't call them trailers.

Whatever the moniker, manufactured homes are gaining in popularity across the United States and in Michigan.

The U.S. Bureau of the Census reports that 203,932 factory-built homes were shipped in 1994, the most built since 1985, when 233,489 homes were shipped.

What's more, an additional 359,220 manufactured homes are expected to be built in 1997, the Arlington, Va.-based Manufactured

Housing Institute, a trade association, predicts.

"A lot of people don't care anymore if their home is handcrafted by carpenters or built in a factory, as long as the quality is there," said Walter R. Young Jr.

Young is chairman, president and chief executive officer of Auburn Hills-based Champion Enterprises Inc. It is the second-leading builder of manufactured homes in the nation.

Industry officials say about 17 million people live in 8.3 million manufactured homes across the United States, and one-fourth of

all new housing starts nationwide are manufactured homes.

Michigan ranks ninth among the 50 states with 10,659 homes shipped here in 1994. The state has 1,009 licensed mobile home parks containing 149,304 sites.

Only North Carolina, Texas, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee and Kentucky had more homes shipped than Michigan last year.

Oakland County led all of Michigan's 83 counties in the number of sites available in licensed mobile home parks. State figures indicate the county had 64

licensed mobile home parks containing 17,425 sites in 1994 and that doesn't include the hundreds of manufactured homes being erected on private property where records are not available.

Manufactured homes are slowly shaking their "trailer park" image, industry officials said.

"Like all the housing industry, manufactured housing went through the terrible decade of the 1980s," Young said. He took over Champion Enterprises five years ago when it was near bankruptcy.

Young said manufactured home builders made a move toward quality that has improved the industry's image.

Richard Vandermolen, deputy

director of the Michigan Manufactured Housing Commission, which regulates and licenses manufactured home communities in the state, said new communities are hardly the trailer parks of the past.

"In many cases, you can't tell the manufactured home community from the stick-built subdivision right next door," Vandermolen said.

The homes come in a variety of sizes and price ranges.

Champion offers homes ranging in price from \$16,000 for a 900-square-foot home to \$85,000 for a 2,300-square-foot home with four

bedrooms, a family room, a Jacuzzi and a fireplace, Young said.

And the homes can be a good investment as well, according to a 1993 University of Michigan study which indicated well-maintained multi-section homes appreciated in value at a similar rate as site-built communities located nearby.

"They used to have a blue book for used manufactured homes just like they do for used cars," Young said. "But the U of M study indicated that manufactured homes built over the last 10 years appreciated in value just like site-built homes. The real consideration when it comes to home value is location."

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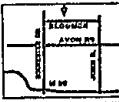
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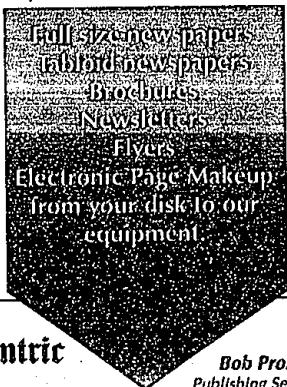
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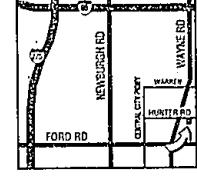
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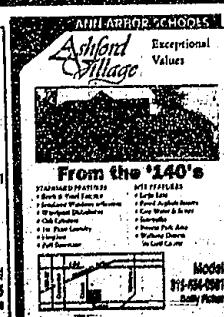


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