

Building Scene

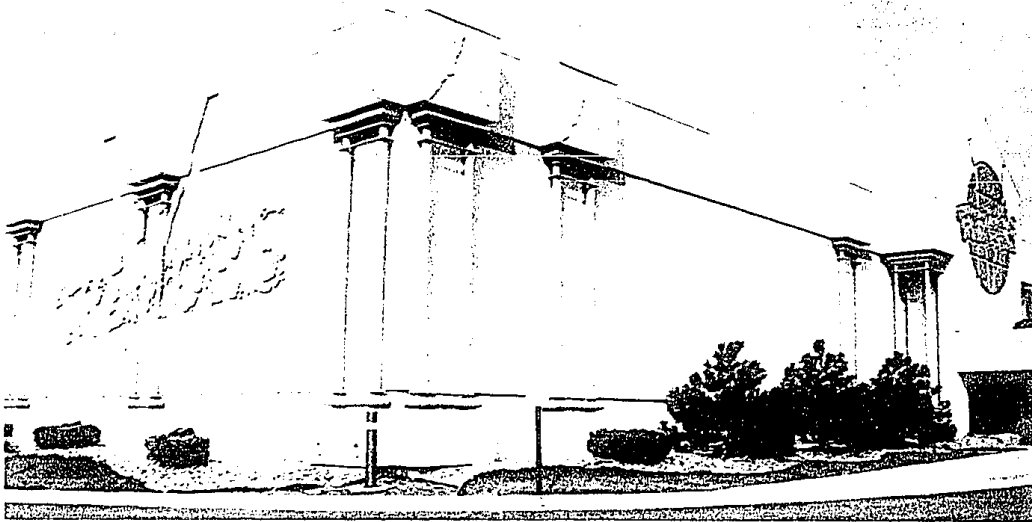
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Marilyn Fitchett editor/591-2300



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The hands of a skilled contractor can work wonders with an exterior wall insulation and finish system. Tremors in Livonia, which was designed by Turner

and Duncan of Dallas and John Campo Associates of New Orleans was cited as an exceptional example of the potential of the system. Trend Construction of

Houston etched the "crevices" atop the pillars and across the "crumbling" logo.

Exterior facing offers variety of looks

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

It's called an exterior wall insulation and finish system — a complicated name for a simple idea that is all the rage with architects. It can be shaped, textured and colored to depict the crevices of an eroded limestone or the rough-hewn shape of mired limestone and even simple stucco patterns. And it keeps you warm, too. "As far as architects and general contractors are concerned, they're really fired up about it," according to Chris Beck of Northern Distributors Inc. "It seems to be the hottest building product on the market."

Known primarily by brand names such as Energeer and Dry Vit, the exterior facing system is popular with architects who design offices, shopping centers and even homes, Beck said. "Architects were kind of leery about getting creative with it at first, but once we got a couple of projects done in the area, it really took off," Beck said. Robert Bryce, a partner with the architectural firm of Erdstein, Bryce, Palazzola & Associates in Birmingham, said his company — which works primarily in residential architecture — has been using the system for eight or nine years. Bryce said the system now is

being used more extensively. "And as more people see it and are impressed with the look and (durability) of it, even more will use it." It's the product's visual appeal, not its insulation value that has sold architects, he said. "That's why we use it — the insulation is really secondary. We would use it even if it offered no insulation." MATT HARAG, president of Harag Extérieurs in Lake Orion, has been working with exterior facing systems like Energeer and Dry Vit for more than a decade in both commercial and residential applications. "It's great. You can basically do any architectural design you want

with it — you can create furniture, art, anything." Harag increased his work force from five to 22 employees to meet the demand. Harag Extérieurs recently did the exteriors of Pine Knob homes near Clarkston. "I imagine we took some work from limestone industry with what we did there," he said, adding the biggest advantage of working with systems like Energeer or Dry Vit is it can imitate more expensive building materials. SCULPTED SHAPES, arches, projections — features that require expensive layering or carving can be done easily with the system, Harag

said. Northwest Distributors' Beck said the material has been around for nearly 20 years but it wasn't accepted until the last four or five. The system has predominantly been used in new construction, but with its growing acceptance it is becoming popular in renovation and remodeling work, Beck said. "I'd have to say it's almost 50-50 now." "Because of its light weight, the system can be installed as 30-foot panels on building faces very easily," Beck continued. "That makes it ideal for covering large surface with minimal work." Exterior facing systems consist of four layers: an expanded polystyrene board provides insulation, a fiber-

glass mesh increases strength, an acrylic-cement matrix provides a base and an acrylic coat furnishes color and texture. The resulting surface is resilient to the elements and durable as well as insulating, Beck said. The exterior wall insulation and finish system materials costs \$1.60 to \$1.70 per square foot, but installation costs bump it up to between \$5 and \$7 a square foot, he said. "The installation costs are high because it takes several steps to put it up, but it's comparable to bricks." Ross Galentine, an architect with Wah Yee Associates in Farmington

Please turn to Page 5

Are impact fees in Michigan's future?

By Gerald Frawley
staff writer

Developers may replace the government as the principal financier of road, sewer and water improvements should impact fees — which are becoming increasingly common in other states — become a reality in Michigan. Mark Wycoff, president of Planning and Zoning Center Inc. in Lansing, a planning consulting firm, called impact fees a "legitimate public activity." He is currently working with Rochester Hills, Springfield, Independence, Oakland, West Bloomfield and Waterford township officials to draft legislation to allow impact fees. The language, which should be completed in about two months, will be presented to lawmakers who have expressed an interest in introducing the legislation, Wycoff said. State legislators and groups from around the state have contacted him about legislation. In a January poll, impact fees — which range from \$200 to \$35,000 per unit — are the number one concern of developers, said Ann Beale of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) land and development office. Beale said builders may absorb some costs, but impact fees will be passed to consumers, which means rising housing, office and commercial costs — all of which could have a stifling effect on economic growth.

THERE ARE alternatives to impact fees, she said. Bond sales based on tax increment financing districts and special assessment districts, for example, could pay for infrastructure improvements, Beale said. Despite a general dislike for impact fees, developers have come to accept them as a part of doing business, Beale said. "Impact fees have pretty much become a reality. As long as they are put together fairly, builders don't have that much of an argument with them."

DEVELOPERS OFTEN take an active role in the development of impact fee regulations.

Several states have passed legislation to allow for impact fees, including Nevada, Oregon, Georgia and Texas. Vermont and Florida have included impact fee language as part of growth management legislation. Several California and Maryland communities created local impact fees that resulted in court cases, Beale said, and Pennsylvania and Indiana are considering impact fee legislation. It is still unclear what impact fees will do to development, Beale said. "If it's not statewide, builders can move to the next county, but if it is statewide, impact fees could have a chilling effect." THE COMMUNITIES actively investigating impact fees are the same communities considered by builders to be anti-development, said James Bonadeo, president of the Builders Association of Southeast Michigan (BASM). "If it's not statewide, they want the impact fees — they want to stop building." An impact fee is not directly injurious to a builder, he just passes it on to the buyer, he said. But impact fees do prevent people from buying houses that would impact builders. "If impact fees go through, you're going to see a hell of a lot of people go out of the building business." Impact fees are often presented under the guise of controlling growth, but the community's definition of "control" is different from builders'. "You can call it control, but remember a control can be turned off," Bonadeo didn't have an easy answer for financing infrastructure, he said. "We've gone through it years now in which the federal government has decreased money for infrastructure, and it's been a dramatic decrease." LOCAL COMMUNITY infrastructure financing options have also been limited, Wycoff said. The federal government has decreased money for infrastructure, and other state laws have restricted the ability to raise revenues for infrastructure.

Please turn to Page 4

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