

Emerald Coast homes are going green

[Sharon Dooley](#)

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By all outward appearances, Todd Stephens' new home in Crestview looks like an ordinary house that could be found anywhere in Northwest Florida.

Beneath the bricks and siding, however, is an ecologically green house, perhaps the first National Association of Home Builders gold-level certified green home in Okaloosa County.

"You don't go down the road and say 'Oh, that's a green house because look how odd it is,'" said Stephens, who is president of the

Destin-based Southern American Homes.

Stephens also serves as a member of the Building Industry Association of Okaloosa and Walton Counties green committee. The BIA's green committee is dedicated to educating members and consumers about green and sustainable products in the building industry, and about how those products can be used in new and existing structures.

"I'm not a tree hugger. I'm not an environmentalist, but some of this makes sense," Stephens said about the green practices implemented into the construction of his home, which is near completion and located in Camellia Cove off Airport Road in the northeastern section of Crestview.

To obtain gold level status for the home, Stephens had to incorporate green and sustainable factors into the entire construction process, beginning with the home concept and concluding with the actual home performance.

"Technically it's all about points," he said. The point system developed by the NAHB requires builders seeking level certification of structures to follow an accumulation of green factors. These range from leaving indigenous vegetation on the lot to installing efficient appliances. It's more than just choosing an eco-friendly floor product such as bamboo or cork.

"They give you all different avenues to get the points," Stephens said. "Which do you prefer?"

For a gold scoring status, the NAHB requires an accumulation of 395 points, and with this house, Stephens has reached 460 points.

Many of the practices that he used are commonly used by builders and developers who aren't necessarily going for green but are going for sensible products and procedures. But some of the more unusual, although easily accomplished, steps have included separating recyclable materials. Stephens placed two waste dumpsters on the property and marked them for specific items. Workers also placed plastic water and soda bottles in boxes, separating them from other trash items.

A walkway was designated for the workers, as well, so that they would inflict the least amount of damage to any vegetation on the property, thus cutting erosion and runoff of topsoil.

"Everybody knows this is green, and they're all excited about it," Stephens said of the crews doing the work on the house. "So everybody is good about staying on the path or putting paper in the right bin."

As construction began, Stephens chose Bora-Care as a termite pretreatment method as opposed to a soil-saturation method. He also grouped utility lines together, having them run along the worker path, so fewer trees were removed from the property.

Low-E windows have been installed, providing a high-performance in sunlight entering the home. High efficiency lighting and appliances will be installed, and the exterior siding contains some recycled materials.

The insulation of the house, however, will give Stephens a return on his investment within a few years.

“Batt insulation is the status quo for building,” he said of the pre-cut panels that are usually pink in color. Stephens opted to use a hybrid form of insulation, applying open-cell foam in some sections such as the ceiling and rafter areas. The foam is made of soy beans, a fast-growing crop. Batt insulation filled in other areas of the house.

The up-front cost of the hybrid system is more, but Stephens expects the savings to come later through lower heating and cooling costs. For his 2,995 square-foot home, a batts-only system would cost about \$3,500. The hybrid system costs about \$8,000.

“In less than five years, you’ve paid for that. Probably four years,” he said.

The insulation alone won’t give Stephens the savings. He and his crew sealed the house.

“We caulked every crack in this house before drywall,” he said, noting that it took 16 cases of caulk to accomplish the job.

Other measures to accomplish the gold status include installation of an efficient on-demand hot water heating system, a cistern to collect rainwater for irrigation, use of indigenous and drought-resistant plants in the landscaping, and much more.

So far, this particular house in Camellia Cove is the only with the gold rating, but Stephens has incorporated green practices in the other houses he has built in the 48-lot development. Selective clearing has been used on lots that have undergone development, and of the completed homes by Southern American Homes, paints low in volatile organic compounds and green-friendly termite treatments have been incorporated.

One home in the development that is complete is a Southern American Homes entry in the 2010 Parade of Homes. The 1,820 square-foot home is listed at \$189,900. The Parade home demonstrates something that Stephens says is easily achievable. It may not be a completely green house, but it features some green elements.

“Green is feasible for anything you build,” Stephens said. “The big secret is you don’t have to go totally green to do some green. It’s not all or nothing.

“The key is helping the customer understand which are the high-value green practices that they can incorporate in their home that’s going to pay them back over time,” he continued, but he also applied a bit of philosophy to the green idea.

“There’re two types of people that green building appeals to: The people that want a payback. They want to know if they’re going to invest in green, then what’s the payback?” he said. “And then you’ve got the people that have a conviction. The cost is secondary to the purpose of going green.”

For information about Southern American Homes, visit southamhomes.com. For information about Camellia Cove, contact Ann T. or Stephen E. Guthrie, realtors with Sun State Realty, by calling 850-748-6659, 850-450-4639, or by e-mail at guthrieteam@sunstatemail.com.

