

S Douglas County **SENTINEL**

Homebuilders seeing 'green' not singing blues

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Area homebuilders don't have a very bright pallet to paint a rosy picture of their industry. Monthly housing starts are in single digits. Foreclosures are at an all-time high, and the vacant lot inventory may take several years to fill.

However, at a recent Villa Rica meeting of the Westside Home Buildings Association (WHBA), the nearly 100 contractors, Realtors and suppliers weren't singing the blues. They were optimistically seeing green in their future.

WHBA has announced an initiative called "Douglas Goes Green," which involves building model energy efficient (green) homes in selected subdivisions and renovating foreclosed homes to meet these green standards.

This industry will likely be the first in Douglas County to make use of federal incentive funds to put employees back to work. The builders hope to use some of the \$3.8 million of the foreclosure renovation funds awarded the county by the federal Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP).

WHBA has scheduled a Wednesday groundbreaking ceremony on its first model home at the Whitestone subdivision on Highway 5, about a half-mile south of the Highway 166 roundabout.

"This campaign kickoff is timed to coincide with Earth Day," said Chris Collier, WHBA executive officer. Other EarthCraft certified, energy efficient model homes will follow at Ashley Falls and Providence Walk in north Douglasville.

The green home program will encourage buyers to buy foreclosed homes that are renovated to meet the EarthCraft green standards. Buyers will get 5 percent down payment assistance and a \$20,000 second mortgage to pay for the renovations. They'll also receive a first-year warranty (unheard of in other foreclosure sales) on appliances, plumbing, electrical, structure and upgrades. Optional 2 to 10-year warranties will be available for purchase to provide all of the above plus additional protection against roof leaks.

Collier said three banks, First National Bank of Georgia, Douglas County Bank and First Georgia Bank, have agreed to work with WHBA on the program.

"We're going to be the direction of the future," said Bobby McMillan, of R&R Enterprises and WHBA president. "It'll show home buyers that you can do green building economically, and because of the payback, you'll get more value for your dollar. It'll also put builders back to work and stimulate the economy."

"We're going to be building homes in a totally different way than we used to build them," said Frank

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Irons of Irons Construction in Douglasville. "They'll be better homes and more energy efficient. We're going to be educating builders and buyers on why this is the best buy for their money."

Jeff Camp of Camdur Building Group of Villa Rica said the home building market is currently stagnant, but he believes the green program will encourage people to buy homes now.

"We're trying to get these folks off the fence, so they will get out and start looking at homes," Camp said. "They'll see that there are opportunities to buy new EarthCraft homes that are environmentally friendly at competitive prices. We're trying to do something that's positive for us and positive for the community."

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