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## Energy efficiency a star attraction

Homes with green amenities that offer savings over the long haul proving appealing



AARON E. DAYE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

David Cannon, right, of One Stop Painting and Floor Covering climbs a ladder to continue painting a zero-energy home under construction in the Longleaf Village subdivision.

By **Anthony Clark**  
Business editor

**M**att and Tiffany Thomas wanted a charming older home in the Duck Pond area or near the University of Florida campus, but the homes they found needed a lot of repairs, and they would have had to put money in reserve for fixes or a new roof.

They then attended a presentation about new energy-efficient homes and were swayed by the savings in monthly utility bills.

"It dawned on us — what were we thinking getting into something older?" Tiffany Thomas said. "It was a relief to be able to find something to provide us with lower electric bills and water bills."

After moving into a new 2,100-square-foot home in the Longleaf Village subdivision last year, she said their utility bills are about the same as in their previous 1,500-square-foot home.

As a Realtor, Thomas said she sees a lot of home

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### ENERGY STAR FOR HOMES

A program of the U.S. Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Agency.

Qualifying homes have 85 or lower HERS in hot climates, 80 or lower in temperate zones.

**19,917:** qualified in Florida.

**2,331:** in Gainesville.

#### HERS INDEX

(Home Energy Rating System)

■ **Score of 100** equals the energy efficiency of a typical code-built home, determined by independent energy auditor.

■ **Score of 50** equals 50 percent more efficiency.

■ **More certified energy-efficient homes in Gainesville and the tax credits and rebates available, 4A**



# HOMES: City long at forefront of green building

Continued from 1A

buyers go through the same battle. They like the charm of older homes, but more and more are going with new energy-efficient homes to lower their monthly bills.

The housing bust has been particularly hard on new home builders, whose costs of construction make it hard to compete with the dropping prices of existing homes. But more buyers are looking at the ongoing costs of home ownership vs. just the first cost, said Bill Shepherd, energy and business services manager at Gainesville Regional Utilities.

Builders say they can build in the energy-efficient amenities without the homes costing much more than those built just to code after factoring in tax credits and rebates.

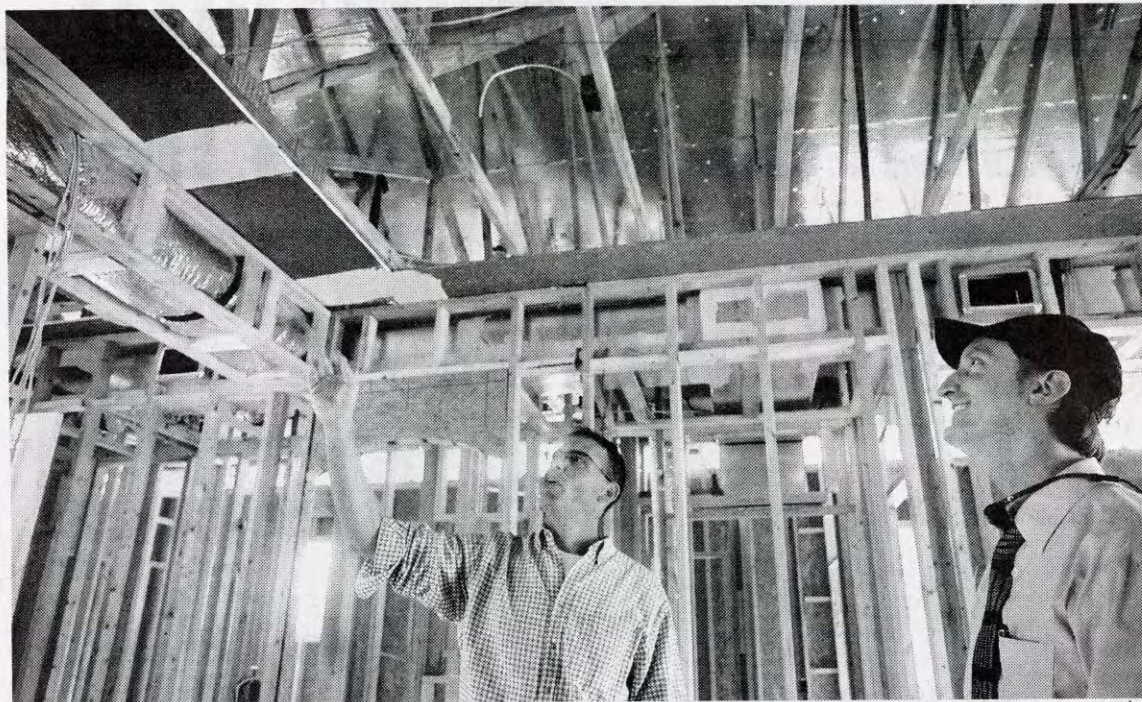
This month's Parade of Homes showed just how important energy efficiency has become as one builder after another touted amenities such as heat-blocking roofs, tankless water heaters, sunshade windows, efficient appliances, premium insulation, airtight construction and double-pane, low-energy windows.

Kara Sutton of Sutton Family Homes of Newberry said the cost of green products and techniques can vary widely, so determined builders have learned what is affordable to most homeowners, such as using insulation to create a more airtight home instead of buying a more expensive and efficient air conditioner.

Tommy Williams Homes is using fewer high-cost solar panels by spending more to make the home more efficient as part of an ongoing project to construct a home in Longleaf that uses net zero energy, Vice President Todd Louis said.

Gainesville has long been at the forefront of the green building movement.

Gainesville developer Howard Wallace said he built the first Energy Star home in the state in the mid-1980s. According to the federal program, he has since built 170 Energy Star homes in the area. The latest is a modular home in his Villas at 39th development off North Main Street and 39th Avenue with a Home Energy Rating System (HERS) score of 57, meaning it uses 57 percent of the energy of an average code-built home.



ARON E. DAYE/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Todd Louis, center, vice president of Tommy Williams Homes, gives Sean McLendon, sustainability program manager with the County Commission, a tour of the new zero-energy home Louis' company is building at the Longleaf Village subdivision on Thursday.

Louis said the Mentone subdivision built in the Kanapaha area more than 10 years ago was the first Energy Star community in the nation. At the time, he was in sales for the developer, Atlantic Designs.

Of 162 homes built and sold in Florida under the Department of Energy's Builders Challenge program, 126 are in Alachua County. Qualifying homes use 70 percent or less of the energy of the average home. Of 65 builders in the state participating in the program, 14 are in Gainesville.

Gainesville has 2,331 Energy Star homes that use 85 percent or less of the energy of an average home.

The Brytan subdivision has three homes certified by the U.S. Green Building Coalition's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Homes program with two more pending, and has started a new program that will allow residents to monitor and compare energy and water use. Builders also are guaranteeing energy savings.

Wallace said energy efficiency was not a big selling point for a long time, but energy waste has long been one of his pet peeves.

"The largest energy consumer in our country is still our homes, so this is really important," he said.

His early customers tended to be professors and engineers

who understood the science, and people concerned about the environment.

Energy efficiency has become more of a selling point in new homes among more people over the past four years, builders say. "Since global warming has become so generally understood, coupled with this energy crisis and amplified by the financial crisis, everyone has an awareness that maybe that's something they need to look at," Wallace said.

"For the longest time, it was hard to get people to listen to the energy features," Louis said.

When Tommy Williams, his current employer, held a groundbreaking on its zero-energy home in February, Louis said he was questioned about it nonstop for four hours and that interest continues to be "off the charts."

According to the Department of Energy, eight zero-energy homes have been built, sold and certified so far in the U.S.

As more builders jump on the green bandwagon, the early adopters are doing more to distinguish themselves. G.W. Robinson and Tommy Williams Homes have built more Builders Challenge homes than all the other builders in the rest of the state combined and have committed to building homes that all meet Energy Star standards.

"We have to pay attention to

## Tax credits and rebates

■ Federal tax credits are available to new home buyers for 30 percent of the cost of geothermal heat pumps, solar panels, solar water heaters, small wind energy systems and fuel cells.

■ Home builders are eligible for a \$2,000 federal tax credit for a new home that achieves 50 percent energy savings for heating and cooling.

■ Producers of new manufactured homes are eligible for a \$1,000 federal tax credit for achieving 30 percent energy savings for heating and cooling.

## GAINESVILLE REGIONAL UTILITIES REBATES FOR NEW HOMES

■ Efficient central air conditioning, up to \$550.

■ Natural gas tankless water heater, gas furnace, range and dryer, up to \$750; or maximum \$500 for solar water heater.

■ Efficient pool pump, up to \$350.

the competition and are keenly aware that everybody has stepped up," Louis said. "It's forced us to continue to improve as well."

Tommy Williams has been offering to pay its customers' first year of utility bills, with

## Certified energy efficient homes

### DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY BUILDERS CHALLENGE

Qualifying homes have 70 or lower E-Scale.

**1,835:** certified nationwide (built, sold, occupied and certified).

**162:** in Florida.

**126:** of those in Alachua County.

**77:** by G.W. Robinson Builder.

**39:** by Tommy Williams Homes.

**5:** by Skobel Development Inc.

**5:** by Spain & Cooper Construction.

### U.S. GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL'S LEADERSHIP IN ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN LEED FOR HOMES PROGRAM

Point system based on number of green amenities in house, property and community, including Energy Star for Homes qualifications.

**27:** in Florida.

**3:** in Gainesville, all in the Brytan development.

**2:** by Tony Sullivan Construction.

**1:** by Loren Spies Construction.

### NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF HOME BUILDERS RESEARCH CENTER CERTIFIED

■ Different levels of green certification based on points for various green amenities and construction practices.

■ Starts at 85 percent energy efficiency compared to a typical home for bronze up to 40 percent for emerald.

### FLORIDA GREEN BUILDING COALITION CERTIFIED

■ Point system based on number of green amenities in house, property and community.

■ More than 260 certified in Florida in 2009 through Sept. 17

■ One in Gainesville, built by Ivan Solbach Company, with second-highest score in the state.

about 30 takers so far.

"It's a way of backing up what we're saying, to differentiate ourselves from the 'greenwashing' that's going on from everybody claiming energy-efficient homes because they have one energy product in their home," Louis said.