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Green building grows popular

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By ANNA THIBODEAUX
For The Times htimes@bellsouth.net

More Southerners use Earth-friendly home construction

There was a time when even Kermit the frog agreed it was hard to be green. That's certainly changing now as the South hurriedly catches up to the North with building and seeking more energy-efficient houses.

With skyrocketing energy bills, it's no surprise that "green building" is taking hold in residential construction as a way to try to curb that cost, as well as promote more efficient use of resources.

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"My impression is that it is catching on rather fast, especially with the consumer," says John Allen, president of the Huntsville-Madison County Builders Association and owner of Southern Construction & Design. "The market, right now, is especially sensitive to energy costs that are on rise as this affects the consumer pocketbook. They are looking to ways to save on this cost."

It's become such an expense that Allen says people now look at how much they can afford in a mortgage and insurance and then want to know what they should anticipate in their first energy bill in any house they're buying. If they're building a house, then he says more consumers want an energy-efficient design these days.

If you're one of those people who may build then you'll want to know the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) has green building guidelines that offer you three different levels - bronze, silver and gold - of energy-efficient design so your house can be certified "green."

Allen says each level has minimum requirements necessary to award the level. While each level higher also rises in up front costs, he says it's important to know it also results in higher energy savings so you quickly recoup the investment.

"The more you put in, generally speaking, the more savings you would see over the lifetime of the structure," he says. "Design elements could include geothermal heat pump, HVAC units, spray foam insulating systems, insulating concrete form wall systems, Energy Star appliances, grey and brown water reclamation systems, use of recycled materials, use of truss system and engineered lumber, radiant roofing barriers, solar power, wind turbine power generators, on-demand hot water systems."

The local association is helping promote the NAHB's National Green Building Program.

"More and more houses in our areas are being constructed with green building techniques, procedures and materials," Allen says. "Green building is a generic term to describe the activity of building a structure to maximize resource efficiency, energy efficiency and also sustainability of the structure."

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