

A new frontier: Shugart now building only green, Energy Star

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Andrew Nicola with Southern Energy Management in Raleigh tests ducts.

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Homes in Shugart Enterprises' Faircrest neighborhood in Greensboro are now being constructed to meet Energy Star and green building standards. Andrew Nicola with Southern Energy Management in Raleigh tests ducts in one of the homes.

Credit: [Nancy Sidelinger Special Sections Photographer](#)

Learn more

Visit the following Web sites to find more information about the building programs. • Shugart Enterprises: www.shugartenterprises.com • Triad Green Building Council: triadgreenbuilding.org • National Association of Home Builders: www.nahbgreen.org/About/default.aspx • Energy Star: www.energystar.gov.

Shugart Enterprises started serving up a special blend of features in its homes this spring: The company's houses will be certified by two national programs to be energy efficient and green built. The longtime builder announced earlier this year that it plans to begin building all its new homes to meet federal Energy Star and National Association of Home Builders standards. The green designation includes Energy Star requirements, and both programs require third-party verification to ensure guidelines are met.

While Shugart isn't the first Triad builder to incorporate Energy Star and green building standards, the volume of homes the company builds makes the shift significant. The builder closed on 374 homes in 2008, and 621 were sold in 2007, according to marketing coordinator Marina Scholten. Shugart is actively building in 30 communities across the region, and home prices range from the \$90,000s to the \$300,000s.

Shugart calls its major new building initiative "the Shugart second-generation home." Les Frye Jr., Shugart's director of special projects, says the company adopted the new building standards because "we want to give the most value to our customers."

Owner and president Grover F. Shugart Jr. says he's convinced green building will become standard for new residential construction. "It's what's going to be in the future for new homebuilding. It's absolutely the future. It's one of the few things I've seen in my 43 years of business that has as much benefit to the buyer long-term."

To earn the Energy Star certification, a home must meet guidelines for energy efficiency set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. These homes are at least 15 percent more energy efficient than homes built to the 2004 International Residential Code, and include additional energy-saving features that typically make them 20 percent to 30 percent more efficient than standard homes. The National Association of Home Builders' green building guidelines encompass the following principles: lot design; resource efficiency; energy efficiency; water efficiency; indoor environmental quality; homeowner education; and global impact. The guidelines offer three levels of green building:

bronze, silver and gold.

Frye says the benefits buyers of Shugart-built homes will enjoy include lower utility bills, more comfort and quiet, healthier indoor air and lower maintenance. Plus, they'll help protect the environment.

According to Duke Energy's Paige Sheehan, the utility offers Energy Star homeowners a special rate that saves an average of 5 percent on their monthly bills.

Frye notes builders choose what practices and features to include to qualify for an Energy Star home certification. "There's a whole menu as to what you can do," he said. For example, Shugart decided to upgrade gas furnaces to 90 percent efficiency.

When heat pumps are used, they have also been upgraded for an equivalent efficiency rating, Frye added. The building code efficiency rating for both types is 80 percent.

Each home's mechanical system is designed for a healthy amount of indoor air quality. And Shugart's homes now receive more caulking on frames, insulation that prevents air leaks and the added protection of sprayed foam behind wall outlets and electrical boxes.

The new motto for Shugart's subcontractors who do framing and insulation is, "You drill it, you fill it," Frye notes.

Energy-efficient, double-paned windows are filled with argon gas between the panes. Insulated foam is also placed between framing headers, an example of advanced framing techniques.

In homes with an attached garage, the wall in the garage next to the home is insulated to help keep pollutants from entering the home.

Shugart has instituted a number of measures to meet the green guidelines. The education piece is accomplished through a homeowner walk-through and a detailed homeowner's manual. On lot design and preparation, Frye said, Shugart tries to lessen the impact of or prevent erosion. The builder also uses native grasses and trees.

Resource efficiency speaks to using durable materials, such as vinyl siding and windows. Water efficiency includes the use of water-saving appliances.

Shugart said his company had been looking at green building for a couple of years. "In the spring of 2008 we got more information and became more involved with folks who had dealt with production issues. Builders we talked to — with the help of subcontractors and suppliers — felt it was warranted and that people would pay for the cost difference."

The higher costs associated with green and energy-efficient building vary depending on the level the builder and buyer are trying to achieve, builders say. The programs provide options for levels of compliance.

"We felt we could do it for another \$5,000 to \$6,000 added to the price of the house," Shugart said.

"In a lot of cases," he added, "we're not passing along half of the extra cost. Some of that is due to the economic times."

Frye said in addition to Shugart absorbing some added costs, subcontractors are absorbing some.

"We all recognize that this is the future. Now our subs will know how to answer others' questions when they get into it."