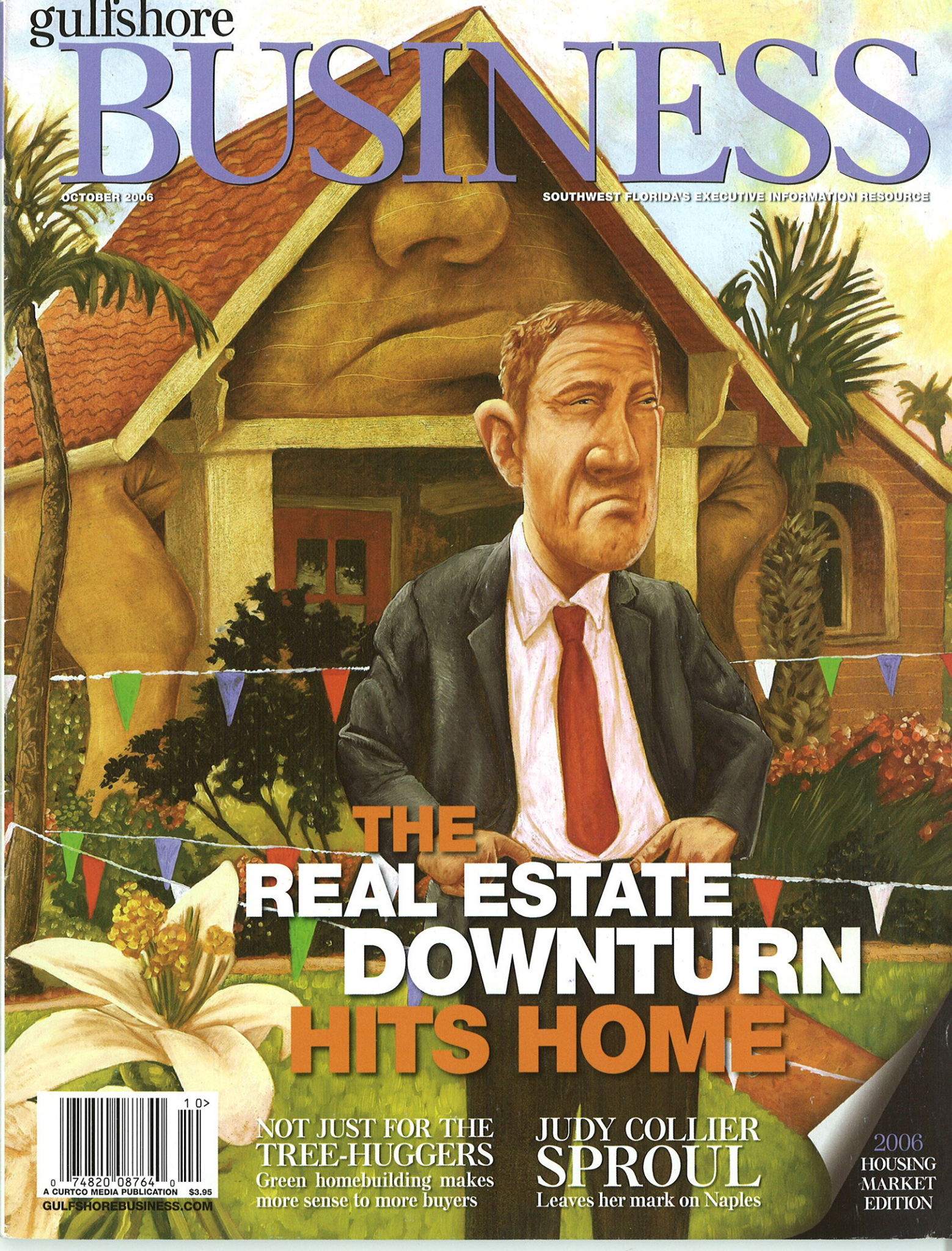


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**NOT JUST FOR THE
TREE-HUGGERS**
Green homebuilding makes
more sense to more buyers

**JUDY COLLIER
SPROUL**
Leaves her mark on Naples

2006
HOUSING
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Some local homeowners may be interested to learn they have just one degree of separation from movie heartthrob Leonardo DiCaprio. Their link: green building components in their homes. Or at least that's what Leo declared on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*. But there appears to be validity to DiCaprio's observations as experts recognize the growing number of homeowners who have embraced green-built homes.

In Southwest Florida, several developers, large and small, are building houses that integrate a variety of green measures, including energy-efficient appliances, recycled drywall, more healthful building materials and landscaping that's easy on the water. Across the country, there is evidence of widespread enthusiasm for green practices, according to a survey conducted by the National Association of Home Builders and McGraw-Hill Construction.

The data show that environmentally friendly residential construction increased by 20 percent nationwide in 2005. The survey results lead to a prediction that by 2010, green building will jump from its 2005 position of 2 percent of housing starts worth \$7.4 billion, to 5 to 10 percent—\$19 billion.

What does green look like? In more exotic applications, some Southwestern homes are being built with bales of hay, and a pio-



Environmentally friendly homebuilding picks up steam.
By Caryn Stevens

neering effort on Marco Island in 1988 saw a waterfront home built with paper cup-type material—expanded polystyrene foam—over masonry/block walls (the owners were attracted to its high insulation value).

Climate conditions would not make the hay house a good option in Southwest Florida, the experts say, and the foam concept, though viable, just never caught on. Other things, however, are moving into the mainstream.

Apologies to Kermit, but area builders are now refuting his Muppet lament by asserting it's getting easier to be green.

When buyers first learned about green-building options that would make their homes more environmentally friendly, few realized all of the choices, builders report. Those customers who were gung-ho for the concept were often considered oddballs rather than mainstream consumers.

"There was a time when most folks said they wouldn't spend \$12 on an energy-efficient lightbulb," says Brenda Talbert, Collier Building Industry Association's executive vice president. "Now they'd rather spend \$12 on a lightbulb than \$200 on their electric bill."

World conditions and better-educated customers are spurring builders not only to provide the standard menu of green options but to add new, proven technology to enhance the process. Builders Michael and Steve Peel decided in 2003 to go green with their company, taking a two-pronged approach. "We embarked on an advertising campaign that incorporated the green-building presence," Michael Peel explains. "And we began educating our customers, not only with our own brochures but with a display room in our design center that showcases green products and manufacturers' literature."

The brothers also decided that their Naples-based Gulfstream Homes would deliver a package of green products as part of the standard offering, rather than as an option at the buyer's discretion. Such things as high-efficiency air conditioners and less-toxic paint and carpeting were included in the price, but big-ticket items, such as (spray foam) Icynene insulation, were left as customer options.

The added cost of the basic green package is minimal—about 2 to 3 percent, Peel estimates, but the results can be dramatic. "We saw it in our own new home," he says. "There was no new-home smell when we moved in, and my son, who has allergies, was much more comfortable than when we moved into our last home."

Peel says more buyers are beginning to realize the triple advantages they can enjoy with green building. "Using recycled drywall and renewable materials is good for the environment, and using paints and carpeting made with fewer volatile organic compounds (VOC) is good for health," he notes. "And using energy-efficient products is good for the pocketbook."

The Peels went green in the homes they built at Indigo Lakes in Naples and are counting on that same buyer savvy for their Veridian community in south Fort Myers, where

all 49 homes, priced in the \$600,000s, will have green built in. "Every home will have enough green building features to be certified by the Florida Green Building Coalition," Peel states.

Jaime and Daniel Thomas really weren't thinking of environmental features when they bought their five-bedroom Gulfstream home at Indigo Lakes. "When we were house-hunting, we were looking for quality and value," Jaime explains. "We were very impressed with Gulfstream's product. In fact they knocked our socks off," she says with a laugh. "When we learned about all the green features, we were even happier."

That's because the couple's older son, Ryan, has allergies. "We built five homes before this," says the stay-at-home mom, "and we all suffered from new-home sickness, but Ryan was especially bothered. This time when we moved in, we were all fine."

The former Boca Raton residents say the types of carpet and paint used in the house have made the big difference in their comfort level.



GREEN HOUSE: WCI'S CASA VERDE DEMONSTRATION MODEL (ABOVE) IN VENICE WAS NAMED THE GREENEST HOME IN THE STATE BY THE FLORIDA GREEN BUILDING COALITION.

A HOUSE BY BORAN CRAIG BARBER (RIGHT) IN CAPE CORAL FEATURES GREEN COMPONENTS, AS DOES THE SAN MARCO MODEL (OPPOSITE) AT THE BONITA BAY GROUP'S VERANDAH DEVELOPMENT.



Daniel Thomas, a computer information manager, traces some of that comfort to the building process. Because Gulfstream crews seal the air ducts during construction, harmful particles don't settle in them, and construction materials are promptly recycled, so the job site is neater and cleaner than most.

The Peels' adoption of green building methods is music to the ears of Jennifer Languell, CEO of Naples-based Trifecta Building Solutions and director of Florida Gulf Coast University's green building program. The material science engineer felt as though she was a lone voice when she first started advocating the concept to the local building industry in 2001.

Now she is encouraged by the number of builders who attend her talks and the NAHB study that anticipates 50 percent of builders will be offering green options this year or next. "I liken small builders to speedboats," she explains. "They can change direction easily. The bigger firms are like cruise ships—not so easy to make a change in direction."

But some of the major players in Southwest Florida have made the turn as well.

Languell mentions that WCF's new Naples community, Artesia, will be green-built and that the company is building green at its Venetian Golf and River Club in Venice. (The Casa Verde demonstration model was named the greenest home in Florida by the Florida Green Building Coalition.) Also, Lakewood Ranch devotes a room of its information center to display green construction and product options at its Sarasota/Bradenton property.

"That way," she explains, "visitors leave the information center already interested in green building products when they go to see the various builders on the site."

The Bonita Bay Group's environmental manager, Kim Fikoski, says that when the company took over TwinEagles in northeastern Collier County, participating builders were required to take a green-building education program designed by the University of Florida. At the company's Verandah development in Fort Myers, models and latest-phase single-family homes include green building components. The company's original community, Bonita Bay, was an early proponent of environmental consciousness

through its encouragement of Xeriscape landscaping and water conservation practices.

Barbie Rogers quips that her company, Naples-based Boran Craig Barber, was green before they knew they were. "We've been installing energy-efficient appliances and using added concrete construction—to prevent mold—for a long time," she reports. "When we stepped up our green building awareness last year, we discovered we were already more than halfway there."

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—Barbie Rogers

private homes have all chosen to include features that will earn them that certification.

What does that get them?

Rogers says it's going to be an attractive selling tool for resale, but more important, it gives the owners satisfaction that they are helping preserve natural resources, saving their own money and securing a high-quality, healthy living standard for their families.

While homeowners with large assets can afford green options, the less affluent might be more inclined to adopt green ways if incentives were available.

The state is stepping up to the plate with the Solar Energy Systems Incentives Act signed by Gov. Bush in June and effective until June 30, 2010. It will provide rebates to customers buying certain solar energy products for home and business and also includes a matching grant package of \$10 million for the research, development and commercialization of renewable energy technologies (www.flascia.org/legislation/signingenergybill2006).

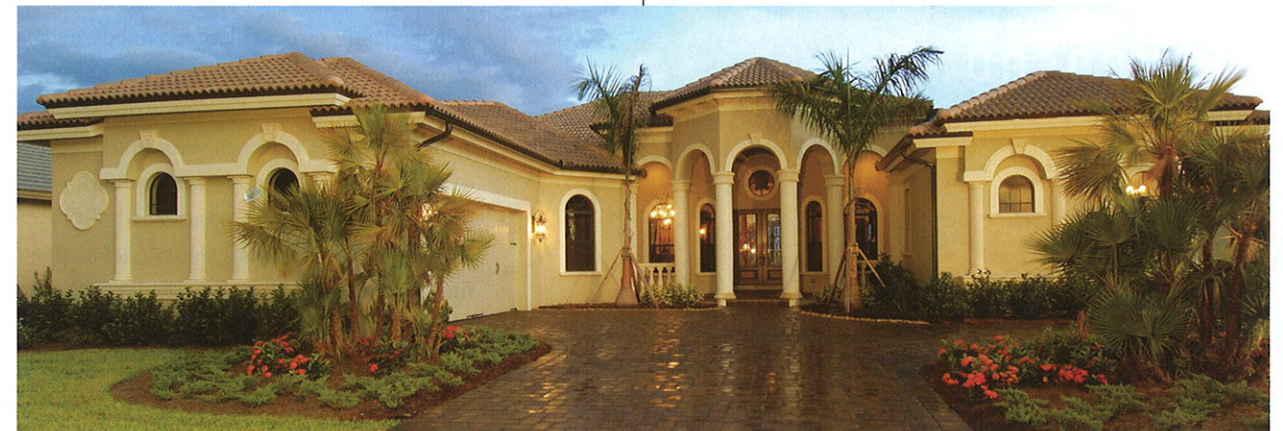
For builders to embrace it, green building has to result in a better bottom line, says Michael Reitmann, executive vice president of the Lee Building Industry Association. "There's no doubt that the perception has changed from what it was a decade ago, and the concept has really gained strength," he explains. "But progress will depend on

"Builders are starting to realize that green building is no longer a niche market but the direction the market is taking. Builders who provide green homes will have a marketing advantage over builders who continue to build nongreen homes." —Roy O. Bonnell Jr.

Ranch reflects the evolution of the concept. Bob Sisum, chairman of FHBA's subcommittee on green building and director of builder programs for LWR communities, recalls how it started at the 33,000-acre property straddling the Sarasota and Bradenton county lines. Homes range from the high \$200,000s to more than \$3 million.

"In 2003, we decided to investigate what was necessary to gain certification for development land," Sisum says, "and we earned Florida Green Building Coalition certification first for 9,200 acres and then another 5,000."

"Next, we called in our 20 builders and announced plans to initiate green building into our homes," he says. "We got some resistance at first. Builders were mainly concerned about the costs, but we told them we'd arrange for consultants to



how well builders can integrate environmental awareness and good business practice to achieve economic success."

There's a partnership acting to help accomplish this. The Florida Home Builders Association (FHBA) has joined with the Florida Green Building Coalition (FGBC) to promote green-building awareness among builders, to unify standards and provide better education for everyone.

According to Roy O. Bonnell Jr., executive director of the nonprofit, independent FGBC, the coalition will publish a magazine in 2007 with relevant articles and resources, and a series of community workshops is planned to bring together builders, affordable-housing proponents and government officials. "Builders are starting to realize that green building is no longer a niche market," Bonnell says, "but the direction the market is taking. Builders who provide green homes will have a marketing advantage over builders who continue to build nongreen homes."

The arrival of green building at 12-year-old Lakewood

review their plans and keep costs to a minimum."

Sisum says that some builders who were reluctant were surprised at what happened once they were committed to building green. "Once the builders were ordering the low-VOC paints in large quantities, the price came down," he says.

When Sarasota County started offering incentives to green builders, such as expedited permits and permit rebates, even reluctant builders jumped on the bandwagon—now all 20 participate.

Sisum says the experience has had an unexpected ripple effect. "Now the developer is looking into establishing green building for the commercial construction taking place at Lakewood Ranch," he states. "And the builders who build here also build at other sites throughout the community. Since they tend to build the same way wherever they are, green building practices are spreading throughout the community." **gb**