

'Green' rebuilding business starts in Sarasota

By STEPHEN FRATER

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Grant Castilow and Steve Ellis co-founded MyGreen- Buildings, a company that rebuilds and remodels homes according to "green" standards and practices, using sustainable and renewable materials and energy-efficient design. The company is focusing on downtown neighborhoods.

SARASOTA -- Steve Ellis and Grant Castilow have some eco-friendly ideas.

Their newly formed MyGreenBuildings LLC will rebuild existing homes to the latest green standards and practices, using sustainable, renewable materials as well as energy-efficient components and designs.

The partners see green in being green, not just for themselves, but also for their clients. In addition to being cool and politically correct, it may also be cheaper than usual construction.

Ellis is a recycling expert, and Castilow is a general contractor with rehabilitation expertise. The company aims to use energy-efficient design to help offset home maintenance costs into the future -- which should bode well for retirees who plan to stay put.

The venture focuses on a four-mile radius in central Sarasota, encompassing the downtown cultural epicenter and the beaches. MyGreenBuildings will rebuild, incorporate additions and remodel for clients seeking "efficiency, grace and elegance in their domicile," according to its Web site mygreenbuildings.com.

Currently, MyGreenBuildings is turning a postwar two bedroom-one, bath Spanish cottage into a 2,000-plus square foot three-bedroom, three-bath luxury home that's energy-efficient.

The project is being developed with local sustainable design experts using green products, energy-efficient systems and recycled products, as well as architectural elements from Sarasota Architectural Salvage.

"Our approach to sustainable housing within Sarasota encompasses more than simply certifying our projects as 'green.' We use a holistic approach to the 'greening' of our vibrant in-town neighborhoods," says Ellis.

"This area is important to us because we want to give our environmentally conscious clients the ability to walk, ride their bikes or just reduce drive time to get to their favorite Sarasota destinations," he adds

The partners hope their business model will help to sustain Sarasota's cultured small-town lifestyle by offering a buyer the ability to achieve what they want in luxury housing "without having to clear-cut what we already have that makes this such a wonderful place to live. We want to conserve the unique and varied architecture of our town," says Ellis.

Castilow, the general contractor, sees the several shades of green in the scheme.

"The company offers sustainable building and remodeling with the potential (to avoid) a substantial tax increase facing buyers when they think of upgrading to a new home," he says. "Sarasota in particular is ripe with opportunities to improve upon existing homes in a way that reduces their environmental footprint and saves them substantial costs in the future."

No 'haystack walls'

Before co-founding MyGreenBuildings, Ellis built a business helping companies reduce, reuse and recycle their waste, while saving clients "tens of millions of dollars annually."

Castilow is a certified general contractor who has experience in remodeling and building additions and commercial build-outs.

The company plans to be as "green" as possible in all phases of work, and the partners say they intend to go beyond what some people might expect out of a green home, "but don't expect haystack walls and landscaped roof systems," jokes Ellis

The proximity of downtown to their projects adds another potentially energy-saving aspect, if their clients cooperate.

"When you live that close to downtown and the beaches, you can bike, walk or use a scooter as alternative means of transportation," says Ellis who since 1998 has put less than 40,000 miles on his 1997 car, about 5,000 miles per year "and I live over the bridge on Siesta and my office is downtown."

They expect to recycle close to 90 percent of every home they become involved in, which means avoiding tear-downs.

It also means that they don't expect to be hauling Dumpsters to the landfill very often.

They view this as important, Ellis says, since Florida is the fourth-largest waste generator in the country and its "percentage recycled" statistics are terrible compared with many other states.

"When it comes to sustainable building materials and flooring, we'll use alternatives like cool vintage fixtures, decorative windows and doors from Sarasota Architectural Salvage, as well as renewable flooring and finishes," he says. "But, for instance, on ground floors -- we plan to stain and polish the concrete, and that will become our finished product. The look is awesome -- as anyone who has stepped foot in Morton's Market and noticed the floor will attest to."

The finishes will be nevertheless be high-end, though not necessarily mind-bogglingly high. Their current project at 1876 Goldenrod St. will be priced well below their target cap of \$1 million on specs, in this case about \$750,000.

The partners are working with Eco-Smart Inc. to determine which green technology systems are most practical for the house.

There will be elements such as solar water heating, high-efficiency appliances, high-efficiency cooling and heating systems, and superior insulation -- leading to a home that is less expensive to live in and maintain.

Upon completion, the home will be certified using Florida Green Home Designation Standards developed by the Florida Green Building Coalition Inc.

MyGreenBuildings will provide home buyers an owner's manual describing all of the features, systems and warranties, as well as documentation of the process and provenance of the recycled materials and architectural elements used in the construction.

The prototype project "will be fun in that we are going to try and figure out how far we can push the envelope and still have it appeal to a mass audience looking for sustainable yet luxurious housing that's on a 'proper' scale for the neighborhood, and in keeping with the local architecture," says Ellis.

Steve Ellis

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