

Habitat Launches Green Building Program in Memphis

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The Home Depot Foundation and Habitat for Humanity International have announced the creation of "Partners in Sustainable Building," whose pilot program will bring a host of "green" homes to a Memphis Habitat neighborhood as early as next year.

The \$30 million nationwide grant program was designed by the two organizations to provide the funding and resources needed to make 5,000 Habitat houses over the next five years sustainable and energy-efficient.

Locally, it will allow Habitat for Humanity of Greater Memphis in 2009 to create Trinity Park, a 38-home development on an 8-acre site at Winchester and Tchulahoma roads near Memphis International Airport.

Jeff Capps, director of community relations for the Memphis Habitat chapter, said details on the pilot program still are being hammered out because the partnership was forged at the international level. But having the Home Depot Foundation pour funding into Trinity Park is welcome news.

"We hope this pilot goes well because it will be just about in line with when we'll start breaking ground on that development," Capps said. "It's really exciting in terms of the longer-term ramifications."

Test area

The local Habitat chapter was one of 30 affiliates selected for the "Partners in Sustainable Building" pilot program, said Fred Wacker, director and chief operating officer for the Home Depot Foundation. The city was chosen for a number of factors.

"Memphis has a very exciting development (Trinity Park) under way. It's not far enough along that it wouldn't be able to incorporate green standards, so we thought it was a great opportunity to work with them," Wacker said. "And they're in one of the climate zones that we wanted to test the program in."



FRIENDS OF THE ENVIRONMENT: Habitat for Humanity of Greater Memphis soon will build more "green" homes like the one pictured above on Polk Avenue. The organization next year will break ground in Trinity Park, a 38-home development on eight acres near Winchester and Tchulahoma roads. -- PHOTOS COURTESY OF HABITAT FOR HUMANITY OF GREATER MEMPHIS



The pilot is targeting a broad range of markets – from rural to urban areas, from warm to cold climates – and it also includes Habitat affiliates that either rehab existing homes or build new ones.

Wacker said the program’s goals are fivefold: help Habitat International beef up training efforts and create a center of excellence in green building; provide money to specific Habitat affiliates; support a host of other national initiatives; assist Habitat affiliates in Mexico; and set aside \$1 million per year for five years in product donations from Home Depot’s Eco Options line of environmentally friendly home improvement products.

That last point is crucial, as green building tends to be more expensive up front because of the sustainable or energy-efficient materials, techniques, appliances and fixtures used. It can add a few thousand dollars to the initial cost of building a Habitat home.

“I think for some Habitat affiliates, because they don’t have a lot of money and build to the income level of the family served, to add on \$3,000 or \$5,000 in cost would be very difficult,” Wacker said. “Unless some kind of subsidy like our program will provide is available, they probably wouldn’t do it – at least now.”

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– **Jeff Capps**

Director of community relations, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Memphis

Green progress

Habitat for Humanity of Greater Memphis already has built green homes. It partnered with Memphis Light, Gas and Water Division last year to build energy-efficient homes through the utility company’s EcoBUILD initiative.

Green homes, whether they incorporate EcoBUILD or the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) guidelines, have a smaller carbon footprint. That means they’re easier to cool or heat – and that means lower utility bills for homeowners.

“We’re thrilled to be a part of it,” Capps said of the new program. “It’s continuing something that we’ve been proactive in starting the last few years through MLGW’s EcoBUILD program.”

Green building truly has taken off this year in the city. The Memphis Area Home Builders Association recently unveiled its green building initiative, and the University of Memphis’ Center for Sustainable Design is building a green home in Uptown.

Capps lauded the rise of green building both nationally and locally.

“Finally, the environmental cause is taking hold after all these years,” he said. “People are finally seeing that it’s good for everyone: It’s good for the planet; it’s good for individual homeowners; it’s good for our neighborhoods. I’d definitely say that we are starting to see a change in the paradigm regarding green building.”