

Home Depot and Habitat for Humanity Back Green Building

By Zaher Karp

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The partnership between a home improvement company and a shelter provider might seem simple, but the plans that two established organizations have now are far from cut and dry. A \$30 million green building program is going national, funded by the Home Depot Foundation, and plans to build 5,000 efficient homes over the next five years.

Habitat for Humanity and the Home Depot Foundation started a pilot last year through 30 affiliates that resulted in 260 sustainable homes. The Partners in Sustainable Building program began there, and is now poised to break into the national sphere.

Some of the homes were even certified to LEED Platinum, which resulted in nearly 50 percent energy savings in some cases. During the pilot, which according to Habitat for Humanity CEO Jonathan Reckford was “extremely successful,” early results yielded 15 to 30 percent energy savings.

At the end of August, over 120 Habitat for Humanity affiliates will participate in the national rollout across 45 states. Affiliates will receive grants depending on certifications that structures attain-- \$3,000 for Energy Star guidelines and up to \$5,000 for other nationally recognized standards.

Habitat expects nearly 1,500 homes to be built between the August start and the end of 2010. Some of the certifications mentioned by Reckford were the National Association of Home Builders standard, LEED, EarthCraft and Enterprise Green Communities.

Retrofitting has been an emphasis by administration recently, citing green jobs and efficiency, though Habitat is meeting an ever-expanding need for new and innovative construction. These new buildings will be supported by Habitat’s network through eight Habitat State Support Organizations (which service 4,400 affiliates) and will be growing in size and host new training sessions to teach green standards.

Out of the 263 homes built in the pilot program, most buildings leaned towards a higher green building level (135) and 128 were certified to the Energy Star guidelines.

“Our mission is to provide decent, simple affordable housing to families and we’re committed to being able to provide affordable home ownership. By keeping houses highly energy efficient and by building small energy efficient homes lowers the total cost of ownership-- we are deeply committed to keeping not only the upfront expenditures, but also monthly costs affordable,” said Reckford.

The process will also be contributing to greenhouse-gas reductions, shedding 11 tons of annual household carbon and greenhouse-gas emissions when compared to standard home building, or the equivalent of plucking 250 cars off American roadways. Water consumption is also targeted by the program, resulting in reductions of up to a third-less demand due to high-efficiency fixtures.

As businesses and government become further entrenched in sustainability, consistently meeting the needs of low-income sectors has been shown to be a weakness. Efforts like those by Habitat and Home Depot could provide options to those who need them most.

