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Rhode Island Builders Association is first HBA to endorse Build American movement

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One of the greatest things about the way Americans think is that the toughest challenges can inspire the best ideas.

On December 6th, the Rhode Island Builders Association's board of directors took note of and endorsed one of these ideas: a "Build American" movement that began a few months ago in Bozeman, Mont., and is attracting attention around the country.

Now nearing completion in Bozeman is the first documented "All American" house - literally. Every possible component of the 2,000 s/f house at 514 E. Cottonwood St. is made in America, right down to the nails, screws, plastic sewer caps and underground copper connectors.

The idea, said originator and general contractor Anders Lewendal of Anders Lewendal Construction, is to increase American employment by 225,000 jobs now, and more later as Build American becomes the norm.

In a recent television report on the Build American idea, ABC News consulted The Boston Consulting Group, a global management strategy firm, which agreed with Lewendal's assessment and figures.

Lewendal, a Bozeman-based member of the National Association of Home Builders with a degree in economics and 140 new houses under his belt, said that he studied reports from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and concluded that if every contractor in America increased his or her use of domestically-made products by only 5%, the country's economy could grow by more than 100,000 jobs.

According to the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, at least 51% of a product's components must be made in the United States for it to be considered officially "made in America." Lewendal thought, "Why not 100%?"

"Home building can still help solve our national economic issues even if we cannot just build ourselves out of this recession. Let's promote U.S. manufacturing together," Lewendal told The Rhode Island Builder Report.

"My latest idea is to get one NAHB member to build an All American Home in each state. That would create a buzz!"

The more American a project, the quicker the economy will recover, he declared.

"It's bipartisan, an economic stimulus plan," Lewendal said, stating that he wants to see contractors, politicians and homeowners working together to make it an industry standard.

Some practicalities

While unanimously endorsing "Build American," RIBA directors recognized that it will take some work to make such projects practical.

"It would help to have some kind of directory of U.S. manufacturers, for example. The more easily

we can find out what's actually made in America, the quicker we can put this into practice," said Michael DeCesare of DeCesare Buiding Co., Inc.

Lewendal said that such a directory is in the works, but that any project requires careful record keeping. A spreadsheet on his computer confirms that every component is predominantly American. He says "predominantly" because a computer chip in an American-made appliance could have come from Taiwan.

Until he's closed the book on the Bozeman house, Lewendal can't say whether Building American is more expensive than the alternative. He doesn't think it will be.

Watch The Rhode Island Builder Report for more information as this matter develops. For an informative video, visit Lewendal's website at <http://buildingbozemanhomes.com>.

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