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Northland Residential LEEDs the way in green construction

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While many area builders continue to debate and consider "green" construction, Northland Residential Corp. of Burlington, Mass., is turning their Green Building vision into reality today. In the last two months, the company unveiled a new initiative - "Built Better, Built Northland Residential Green" - and received a first-in-the-region LEED certification for its model homes and sales center at their Bourne townhome community.

The prototypes represent the first new construction condominium development throughout Mass., N.H. and R.I. to be certified by the U.S. Green Building Council. While LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) techniques have been used for years in commercial building, they only recently have been integrated into the residential arena, with fewer than 500 homes certified nationwide.

Why did Northland Residential commit to Green Building?

Jack Dawley, president and COO, said the new initiative grew naturally from the company's strong legacy of environmental consciousness.

For 38 years, Northland Residential has taken great care to integrate its properties into existing landscapes and optimize available resources. In doing so, the company has been able to maintain its focus on environmental responsibility without compromising quality and sophistication. This past year, the National Assn. of Home Builders recognized Northland Residential with a Building With Trees Award of Excellence.

"We are proud to be one of the first builders in New England to embrace best-practice sustainable building systems that conserve energy and water, improve indoor air quality and preserve building materials and land," said Dawley. "Furthermore, LEED certification demonstrates our company's steadfast commitment to environmental stewardship and social responsibility," said Dawley.

That commitment to LEED for the model homes did introduce some new challenges to the construction of the Bourne sales center.

Sean Skehill, The Villages at Brookside project manager, led the LEED effort. He notes that it was clear early on that this would not be "business as usual." While Northland had long benefited from a team of architects, designers, subcontractors and vendors, the team now had to become highly integrated to meet the LEED requirements. Documenting what they would do and how became extremely important.

"We met frequently to iron out our thoughts, needs and ideas," said Skehill. "We looked at how we could achieve each goal with a new eye, thinking about energy efficiency or water conservation or the longevity of materials."

As Skehill and Northland were learning the process themselves, they worked closely to educate their vendors, spelling out new requirements. The challenge to improve their LEED "score" paid off with new discoveries or choices, said Skehill. Now, those green materials - such as blown cellulose

insulation products; dual-flush toilets; drip irrigation rather than spray heads; or higher efficiency sprayheads and more sophisticated timing devices - are being incorporated into other Northland homes. "They are efficient and work well," he noted.

Another challenge the team met head on was the idea that "green" had to be boring or ugly. They spent extra time looking at options. For example, Brookside's LEED models incorporate mainstream Kohler fixtures with slight modification to conserve water use but not sacrifice level of finish.

Dawley pointed out that the company's commitment to green makes particularly good business sense in the Bourne community.

"The Villages at Brookside is a community that primarily attracts homeowners 55 or better. We believe that Green Building is especially suited for mature homebuyers," said Dawley. "For example, studies show that 62% of 50-64 year olds are managing at least one chronic condition, and that figure grows to 80% of those over 65. These people will benefit from the healthier indoor environment our homes offer."

The financial benefits provided by homes with higher energy efficiency and fewer maintenance issues are attractive to 55+ homebuyers as well. With today's rising fuel costs, it gives the Villages at Brookside an edge over competitive communities.

All future homes constructed at The Villages at Brookside will meet the high standards of "Built Better, Built Northland Residential Green." The company is even going so far as to retrofit standing inventory where possible, integrating green technologies, products and materials.

"We'll do what we can, where we can, to give homebuyers a 'Built Better' home," said Dawley.

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Northland Residential's diverse portfolio includes ocean- and lake-front developments, golf-course communities, renovated historic properties, private single-family and vacation homes, and luxury condominium communities. For more information about Northland Residential and its properties, please visit www.northlandresidential.com.

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