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Business goes green with modular homes

By Steven Ryan
STAFF WRITER

A Needham-based modular home business is hoping its customers leave neighbors "green" with envy with more energy-efficient new homes.

In May, Heritage Modular was awarded the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce's Green Business of the Year Award for its efforts "to incorporate environmentally sustainable business practices into their daily operations."

Heritage Modular has been building Energy Star-certified modular homes since 2007.

"Our customers are really interested in green," said Hallie Pinta, vice president of Heritage Modular, which has offices on Central Avenue. "That got us started going down the path with



The interior of the Westwood home Needham-based Heritage Modular constructed to be Energy Star certified. The company used methods such as stronger insulation, a more efficient heating system and utilizing the natural heat from sunlight to make the home more energy efficient.

what we're doing with Energy Star modular homes."

Heritage Modular began the process a couple of years ago by bringing in green consulting firms to look at modular homes not designed to be Energy Star homes, and they pointed out ways to make the home more energy efficient.

"We took that back to the factory and ran with it," Pinta said.

Energy Star is backed by the federal government and promotes greater energy efficiency by promoting certain products or practices.

Heritage Modular essentially uses prefabricated, ready-made parts custom built in Pennsylvania, through a partnership with Excel Homes, to construct homes. Essentially, the house is 70 percent complete by the time

the parts are brought on site, said Sean Sweeney, owner of Heritage Modular and Heritage Homes in Needham.

"Modular homes are green in and of themselves," Sweeney said. "Because the parts are brought in from the factory and the wood is cut to length, the amount of waste is much smaller."

Heritage Modular took what it learned from the consultant and brought those concepts to its partner, Excel Homes, to apply to the Pennsylvania-based company's entire group of builders. Excel Homes, in turn, has developed a marketing campaign based on promoting the more energy-efficient homes.

Heritage Modular customers are given the option of having

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Business specializes in energy-efficient homes

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their home Energy Star-certified. Pinta said most customers are now choosing the more energy-efficient route. She noted in Needham, no one has ordered an energy-efficient modular home, but such homes have been put up in Westwood, Wellesley, Natick and Lexington. Sweeney estimated the average Energy Star home averages a 30 percent savings in energy costs, or about \$400 a year.

Some of the efficiencies in an Energy Star-certified home include the installation of added insulation. Also, windows and doors are positioned to take full advantage of sunlight to naturally heat the home. Through testing, the home is checked for any leakages to make sure the home better retains heat.

Heritage Modular built Jason Lee's Westwood home, which is Energy Star certified, two years ago. Lee said his heating bill is 50 percent less than when he and his wife, Kristy, were living in a condominium.

"We were building, so we thought we might as well do it right the first time," Lee said. "We didn't build a home to get an Energy Star rating. We built it more to save money in the long run."

With a new home Heritage Modular is planning to put up in Marion,



Heritage Modular built this Westwood home to be Energy Star certified. Jason Lee, the owner, decided he wanted a more energy-efficient home due to the cost savings in the long run. Heritage Modular was recently recognized by the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce for its energy-efficiency efforts.

the company is looking to go even further with energy efficiencies, noting Energy Star requirements are essentially the baseline. The home will utilize geothermal heat, which involves drilling into the ground about 400 to 700 feet, or wherever the temperature is a constant 50 degrees, to extract heat. The design also includes the construction of solar panels.

"The customers made a commitment with this house to be as green as possible," Pinta said.

Heritage Modular is also looking to put up LEED-certified homes. LEED is a private organization that goes even further than Energy Star certification.

Although the green initiative started as an attempt to meet customer needs,

Pinta is proud of the recognition Heritage Modular received from the Newton-Needham Chamber of Commerce.

"It is fulfilling to be recognized for efforts we've been undertaking to improve home design and educate customers on what we're doing," Pinta said. "We're very excited to get through the learning curve. There's a lot of information out there on how to make homes energy efficient and cost efficient. We've worked our way through it."