



Avington Park's greener standards

BY ANAJALI FLUKER | STAFF WRITER

Orlando-based developer Heritage Green LLC is seeking approval for a new \$50 million subdivision in Lake County near Mount Dora as a green development – with a twist.

Alex Kane, Heritage Green's vice president of development, says the firm is looking to roll mandates into homeowner association and builder agreements that require EnergyStar appliances, Florida Water Star building strategies and orienting the homes so most of the windows face south, helping to block solar gain in the summer.

Kane says the developer also wants custom homebuilders for the project who use environmentally friendly construction techniques and materials.

Heritage Green's idea to raise the bar on environmentally friendly homebuilding standards probably will gain more popularity in the industry as "going green" becomes more of a regulatory requirement, predicts St. Cloud homebuilder Don Wetherington.

To be sure some upfront costs for doing so likely will be higher for builders and, thus, homebuyers. But eventually those higher costs will be viewed as a wise investment, as energy-efficiency

and environmental consciousness becomes more important to the general public.

After all, if a house isn't "green," it's going to have higher maintenance and energy costs, says Wetherington, owner of Wetherington Builders Inc. and president of the Home Builders Association of Metro Orlando.

In the future, using "green" building standards may even become a mortgage qualification, where finance companies consider energy efficiency in qualifying ratios, he adds.

The reason behind Heritage Green's aggressive push started with a look at historical construction techniques, such as maximizing natural lighting and breezes coming through the building, Kane says. "It's the way things were done hundreds of years ago. Things changed, and this technology was completely lost or forgotten. We're reintroducing it."

Heritage Green will submit permit requests to Lake County in the next month or so and looks to start construction within the next two months on the community, dubbed Avington Park. It has 42 lots on 210 acres, with lot sizes

ranging from 3-5 acres and prices from the upper \$200,000s to nearly \$500,000.

Kane says the project already received a low impact development designation from St. Johns River Water Management District and plans to apply for Water Star certification on the homes – which involves reducing a home's water use by 20 percent indoors and 40 percent outdoors.

The company also has been working with the University of Florida's Institute for Sustainable Energy for the last two years on developing more environmentally sound concepts for the community. Peirce Jones, director of the Institute's Program for Resource Efficient Communities, says while some developers just "greenwash" their projects – market the developments as green without seeking real benefits to the environment – Heritage Green is making an honest effort to do the right thing. "We think these practices are sound, but we'd like to be in a position to evaluate the effectiveness of these projects."

Brian Sheahan, Lake County planning director, says the county supports the project. "We're interested in sustainable development and smart growth."