

Build the American Dream at Parade

By Kimberly Ballard

For The Times

"Build the American Dream" is the theme of the 32nd Annual Fall Parade of Homes sponsored by the Huntsville/Madison County Builder's Association (HMCBA).

Opening Columbus Day weekend, Saturday through Monday, Oct. 10-12, and extending into the following Saturday and Sunday, Oct. 17-18, this year's Parade features 75 homes scattered across 66 subdivisions throughout Madison County. Homes are open from 1-5 p.m. each day.

"Building the American Dream is a celebration of home ownership. Homeowners are the single largest creators of wealth in our country," says Lynn Kilgore, executive director of the HMCBA. "Building, buying and operating a home requires many resources and consumers are willing to spend money to make their home everything they dreamed it could be."

Home on this year's Parade range in price from \$122,000 to \$2 million and are widely diverse in terms of style, size and location. "There is no reason for people to be afraid they can't afford a Parade home," Kilgore says.

The public is welcomed to join a favorite Realtor or builder to tour homes in locations of their choice, or to come out and bring friends and family to look. Visitors do not have to be looking to buy. Representatives are available at each of the featured homes to answer questions about the properties, financing, the neighborhood and schools, or about buying.

"We would love for people to buy a house," says Mark Harris, 2009 president of the HMCBA. "It's a great time to get out and see what Madison County has in terms of new construction. Many people not yet ready to buy can get ideas about design and quality to use for future building. Just don't let people tell you it isn't a good time to buy."

In spite of the national housing mar-

ket woes, Kilgore sees Madison County home values holding up well. Even though credit is slightly tighter than before, market rates are still good right now.

"The timing is actually excellent for first-time home buyers because through Nov. 30, 2009, buyers may qualify for an \$8,000 tax credit if they close before the end of November," Kilgore says. To qualify as a first-time home buyer, a buyer must not have owned a principal residence during the three-year period prior to the purchase. "We still have people moving into the area, and our inventory here in North Alabama is depleting quickly," Kilgore says, "so we encourage people not to be afraid to buy."

Harris says a benefit of building or buying now is that current building material prices are low. "As long as the housing market is slow nationally, prices will remain low, but this won't last long. As the market improves over time, prices will shoot back up." Out of respect for the instability of the national market-

place, the HMCBA decided not to compete with its own member builders by building a Showcase Home this year, but it will return in 2010.

The HMCBA is a non-profit trade association that has been in existence in Madison County since 1957. They currently have over 1,200 members made up of builders, suppliers, subcontractors, Realtors, etc. The Madison County Chapter is an affiliate of the state federation, the Home Builder's Association of Alabama, which in turn is a part of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). "A portion of our dues goes to both the state and national level," Kilgore explains. "Eighty percent of U.S. homes are NAHB homes."

Fall Parade of Homes maps and parade routes are available in *The Huntsville Times*, at <http://www.buildersassn.org> or www.madisoncountyparadeofhomes.com. Pullout maps are also available in the 2009 "Building the American Dream" Parade of Homes guidebook.

Green building a growing industry

By Kimberly Ballard

For The Times

The green building industry has steadily grown over the past 25 years, says Mark Harris, one of North Alabama's first NAHB National Green Builders and current president of the Huntsville/Madison County Builder's Association (HMCBA), but it has shown an unprecedented burst in the past five years.

"In 2005, green building was a \$2 billion industry," Harris says. "In 2010, projections predict it will be a \$60 billion industry. Green building is not a fad. It is here to stay."

What exactly is a green home? According to the National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB) Green Building Program, "a green home pays attention to energy efficiency, water and resource conservation, the use of sustainable or recycled products, and measures to protect indoor air quality."

The guidelines laid down by the National Green Building Standard, published by the International Code Council (ICC) and approved by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) were compiled by builders over several years and constitute four threshold levels that are based on a points system:

Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Emerald.

"These standards were intentionally flexible and intended to be completely voluntary on the part of the consumer," explains John Allen, a certified green professional builder and verifier in Huntsville. "It doesn't cost any more to build a green home, but consumers are sometimes confused by what green means."

Allen says he finds that many consumers believe green means huge sacrifice like keeping the air conditioning set on 80 degrees all summer or installing very expensive solar panels on the roof. "Green builders are showing consumers a more practical approach to green building that doesn't cost more or require giving up anything. When they see how practical it is, they see there is no reason whatsoever not to go green."

The Green Building Program provides a user-friendly tool to consumers on its Web site so they can walk through the four levels and compare green building options in terms of savings, costs and efficiency. Certified green builder professionals like Allen also are accredited as a third-party verifier to come in behind another builder to "verify" points and certify the home is a level Bronze, Silver, Gold or Emerald.

"There are five main reasons why

building a green home just makes sense," Harris says.

■ A green home is more energy efficient. Energy Star ratings are just the beginning, but they are a start. Appliances, windows, water heating systems, efficient lighting fixtures and bulbs, and renewable energy sources like photovoltaic electricity and water heating systems all decrease overall energy consumption. Utility bills in a green home can be 60 percent less than standard new home construction.

■ A green home is resource-efficient in construction and in operations. Every year builders discard enough unused and scrap lumber to frame 62,500 new homes. This is the equivalent to clear-cutting 400,000 acres of land. Green builders reuse or recycle these materials, reducing the amount of material going into landfills.

House orientation and design can take advantage of natural daylight and reduce lighting needs. Green building uses strategies to reduce heat gain in the summer and heat loss in the winter. The green home built with rapidly renewable wood and bamboo and recycled carpets, tiles, and concrete formulations saves resources.

■ A green home is more durable. The consumer will not have to replace the

materials used to build a green home as often as they do a standard-built home. Materials like brick or Hardie Board make for a long-lasting and attractive exterior veneer.

■ A green home is a healthier home. By building with lower emission chemical and volatile organic compound (VOC) paints, avoiding prefinished hardwoods and purchasing formaldehyde-free cabinets, your family breathes cleaner air.

Furthermore, foam insulation seals filter the air to prevent dust and allergies. The heating, air conditioning and ventilation system (HVAC) should be properly ventilated. Fans in the kitchen and bathrooms should cycle fresh air and release stale air.

■ A green home is beautiful and comfortable. A green home can be beautiful and stand for many years.

HMCBA President Harris says there is another reason why green building makes sense. "We live in a world that, in 40 years, has increased in population from 3 billion people to 6 billion people. By 2050, the projected population is 9 billion. The United States is not the only country using the Earth's resources for energy. Other countries are doing so as well. How long can we sustain those numbers?"