

BBN BREVARD BUSINESS NEWS

HBCA Spring Parade models set to open around county — 'Showcase Home' built by Avtec Homes, touts Eco-Star package; taps affordable housing niche

By Ken Datzman

For decades, the Home Builders and Contractors Association of Brevard has hosted its Parade of Homes, a weeklong event where area builders show off their new models to the community twice a year, in the spring and in the fall.

Long ago, the HBCA — an affiliate of the Florida Home Builders Association and the National Home Builders Association — made a commitment to this seasonal format and has stuck with it through up-and-down home-building cycles and gyrating economies.

"We are the only builder association in Florida that puts on two Parades a year," said businessman Jason Stanley, chairman of the HBCA 2014 Spring Parade of Homes and president of Stanley Homes Inc., a third-generation builder. "We have Parades in the spring and in the fall."

Stanley, the immediate past president of the organization, works closely with the current HBCA President Corey Lancaster, who heads Harlan Property Development LLC in Cocoa.

The 2014 Spring Parade runs April 5 through April 13. Stanley said there are Parade models from Malabar in the south to Titusville in the northern part of the county. The homes range in price from the high \$100s to more than \$1 million.

The models will be open for public viewing from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and 12 to 5 p.m. Sunday. The "Community" entry is Capron Ridge in Viera by Monarch Homes of Brevard.

The builders participating in the Parade include Avtec Homes, with the "Showcase Home" in Manchester Lakes in West Melbourne; Adams Homes, with models at Sloneridge in Palm Bay and Falcon Ridge in Melbourne; Arthur Rutenberg Homes, showcasing homes in Charolais Estates in Viera and Casabella in Suntree; Christopher Burton Luxury Homes, with its entry at Charolais Estates; and DiPrima Homes, with a model at Veranda Place in Melbourne.

The list continues: D.R. Horton, with homes at Manchester Lakes, Bent Oak at Meadowridge in Titusville and Emerald Lakes in Cocoa; Emerald Homes, featuring a model at Fairway Lakes at Viera; Joyal Construction, with a model at Charolais Estates in Viera; A&E Custom Homes, with a model at San Marino Estates in Melbourne; Stanley Homes, with entries at Milan in Rockledge and Weber Woods in Malabar; and Viera Builders, with its model at Strom Park in Viera.

Avtec's "Showcase Home" is in the new Manchester Lakes subdivision. The "Constellation 5" model has 2,157 square feet with four bedrooms, three bathrooms, and an office. The single-story home touts the Eco-Star "high-performance energy-efficiency solutions package."

The package has a host of energy-saving features, including a solar water heater, premium insulation, and a leading 15 SEER air-conditioning system. SEER stands for Seasonal Energy Efficiency Ratio.

"As a company, we are focused on energy-efficient, affordable homes and the 'Constellation' model is an example of our commitment in those two areas," said Sandra Forest, who holds a general contractor's license and is president of Avtec Homes in West Melbourne.

A graduate of the University of Florida and Florida Tech, Forest grew up in the home-building industry but first worked in the hospitality management field for hotels. She later became a real-estate appraiser before coming to her position at Avtec Homes.





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BBN photo — Adrienne B. Roth

The HBCA of Brevard will host its annual Spring Parade of Homes April 5 through April 13, with models open around the county for public viewing. The 'Showcase Home' is in the new Manchester Lakes subdivision in West Melbourne. The 'Constellation 5' model was built by Avtec Homes, of which Sandra Forest is president. Jason Stanley is the Spring Parade chairman and president of Stanley Homes. They are at the Showcase Home.

The Constellation starts at \$204,900 and is the largest home Avtec markets in Manchester Lakes. "We allow customization," she said. "We've had customers who have moved walls to make a bedroom bigger and much more."

Julie Rigsby, a new home consultant for Avtec, said consumers have embraced the Constellation 5. Her company has recently sold a number of them.

"People love the energy-efficiency features of the home. They love the layout because it's an open floor plan. They love the granite and tile, the large walk-in pantry, and the porch. The model is attracting a wide range of buyers, especially young buyers," said Rigsby.

Avtec Homes was started by Forest's father, longtime area homebuilder Larry Sietsma. He founded Holiday Builders in 1983 and ran the

business for 16 years before retiring and selling the firm to his employees.

He came out of retirement in 2005 to fill a home-building niche that he saw in Brevard County, that being affordable housing.

Around the time when real-estate values started to skyrocket in price here and across the nation as a home-buying stampede was underway in many communities, Sietsma said to his daughter, "There is no affordable housing out there anymore. I would like to start another home-building company. Would you like to join me?"

Forest said yes and they went on to launch the business.

"My father is an aviation and technology

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APRIL 7, 2014

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enthusiast and that is where the name Avtec came from," said Forest. Sietsma is a former U.S. Marine Corps fighter pilot. He is the acting general contractor for Avtec Homes, which builds in several markets.

Both Forest and Stanley said they are looking for continued steady growth in the local home-building industry.

"We've had two really good home-building years back to back, fueled by low interest rates and the fact that housing inventory continues to diminish in Brevard County," said Stanley, adding, "The especially cold winter this season up north and in other parts of the nation is likely to drive traffic to the Sunshine State, which is an opportunity for home builders."

The Milan and Weber subdivisions are where Stanley Homes has a Spring Parade presence.

Customers have the opportunity to customize their Stanley Homes. "We have our standard floor plans and

we allow customization," said Stanley.

Competitive mortgage rates and an improving economy point to a gradual strengthening of housing activity through the rest of the year, according to a report by the National Association of Home Builders.

"Things are definitely looking up," said Stanley, "but there are some challenges in the local home-building industry. For one, there is definitely a labor shortage."

The industry provides an opportunity to learn the trade and advance up the ranks.

Employment of construction workers is projected to grow 25 percent now to 2022, much faster than the average for all occupations, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Not long after the market "took a dive, a lot of laborers in Florida relocated to other states whose housing markets didn't get hit as hard as ours. Now, we are working to bring them back," said Stanley.

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