

Water-sipper sets mark for Citrus

Showcase model is first home in county to qualify for Water Star Gold standard

By Amanda Mims
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HERNANDO — The gold standard isn't just a thing of the past.



Dave Stigler

Builder John Osborne, Susan Douglas of the Southwest Florida Water Management District and Heritage developer Tom Chancey talk about the water savings this award-winning home has achieved with the types of plants and grass used in the landscaping. Not only will it be more drought-resistant, but the shrubs will tolerate hot and cold weather.

The Southwest Florida Water Management District recently recognized a Citrus County model home for meeting Florida Water Star Gold standards. The home, located on Cobblestone Loop in Hernando inside the Heritage subdivision, is the only one in Citrus County with that distinction.

The title means the house has several different features that all add up to a significant water savings. In a home like this one, residents reduce their water use by an average of 20 percent, according to Susan Douglas, the district's Florida Water Star program coordinator.

Tom Chancey, developer of the Heritage community, said he and the builder, John Osborne, president of Pinecrest Building Corp., wanted to construct a home that is different than others on the market. Chancey said he also wants to show that it's possible to build water-saving features into a home for a low cost.

"Our intent of course is to sell a home, but that's not first and foremost at this point. What we're trying to do is educate the public about what you can do, because most people that came through (during a recent open house) had no idea that you can do the things we have done and do it so cost effectively." The home is also Energy Star certified, and Osborne said it costs less to operate compared to a typical home of the same size and with the same lawn area. The yearly energy cost for the 2,849-square-foot home is estimated at \$1,628.

Chancey believes all new homes should be designed to conserve water and energy.

"We are really not that advanced when it comes to energy conservation in our country. Water is a commodity in some areas of the world where they just don't have it. We do and we are consumers and we are just gluttons to a certain extent. It's time that we change that."

Chancey said much of the energy use in the model home can be attributed to the swimming pool. That particular home costs about \$230,000 new, without the pool and lot. With the lot and pool, the cost is about \$320,000. The home buyer would be paying about \$6,000 more for an energy-efficient model

than a less energy-efficient model, but would see a return on their investment because of the savings in energy costs, he said. In the future, he would like to build a zero-energy home, one that has zero net energy consumption and zero carbon emissions, but only if the demand for one exists. Right now, it doesn't.

"You can build a zero-energy house but if it costs \$400 a square foot to build it, then you're not going to be able to sell it unless somebody just wants to say, 'I own the only zero-energy house in Citrus County,'" Chancey said. "They have to be able to look at the bottom line and say, 'This is how much I'm going to save (compared to) what it costs.'"

Even in a slow housing market, Douglas believes the Water Star program will have a positive impact on water conservation in the state.

"The three water management districts all have the program in their jurisdictions," she said. "It's for homes and commercial. Commercial is a very big one. That's where you see big differences."

Although homes can't be retrofitted to meet Florida Water Star standards, residents can drastically reduce their water use by using Florida-friendly landscaping methods and installing water-saving appliances and features in their homes.

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