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A Passion for Green Building

By Linda Sechrist

Relatively few people on the planet lay awake at night thinking about the amount of energy imbedded in lumber. Stephen Ellis, co-owner of MyGreenBuildings, does and he wonders what to do about it. “MyGreenBuildings constructs new custom homes as well as rebuilds and retrofits existing residential structures using as many sustainable practices and materials as possible.

Explains Ellis, “The imbedded energy in a stick of lumber that we find in the homes while we are doing retrofits today,” says Ellis, “was probably cut and formed in 1946.” By the time it was installed in the home, the wood was already about 100 years old. It was a substantial piece of wood that once grew erect and withstood not only the elements, but time, termites and other predatory insects.



STEVE ELLIS AND GRANT CASTILLOW, CO-FOUNDERS

Harvested in that era, it was no doubt cut down in an ancient forest, dragged out and shipped hundreds of miles, milled into a real 2 x 4, put on a truck to be shipped to the lumber yard where it waited to travel to Florida on a train. There it was off-loaded and sat on a shelf until it was finally sold and then installed in a home. “Think about all the energy that it took from beginning to end,” advises Ellis. “The existing materials in some of the homes we evaluate for re-building are usually still in great condition, so I want to use them in some way instead of automatically scraping and hauling away all that ‘energy’ to the landfill.

It makes sense that such things occupy Ellis’s mind because, he confesses, “I’ve always had a passion for my business and especially for real estate.” Before the Massachusetts native moved to Florida in 1998, he was already environmentally conscious. After selling his Environmental Waste Solutions business he became a self-admitted real estate junkie, buying, selling and retrofitting Florida homes. In his former life as a CEO of his Massachusetts business, Ellis traveled the world evaluating how Fortune 500 companies dealt with their waste and taught them how to develop better and more profitable ways of handling it. He also taught seminars on how to become a waste management consultant. “My whole career has been about fixing things and making them better,” advises Ellis “and it’s why I have this particular second career that proves green building is the way things should happen. After people start seeing our

“killer” green architecture they will really become convinced that they need to build sustainably in an environmentally-friendly way.”

MyGreenBuildings’ awesome green architecture in its Sarasota Goldenrod green prototype is eye catching and wowing. The original 1,000 square foot postwar home was expanded to 2,100 square feet of energy efficient space and won two Aurora awards and one coveted Grand Aurora award from the Florida Homebuilders Association in 2007. “We recycled 85 percent of all the materials we pulled out of the project,” advises Ellis. For instance, the wood was harvested and reused for structural and non-structural purposes in retrofitting process. Materials that remained were taken to Habitat for Humanity. Roof tiles were hauled away to be reused once again in road construction. Goldenrod Project photos as well as those taken at other sustainable projects are viewable at MyGreenBuildings.com, the company’s website.

According to Ellis, clients looking to retrofit an existing home can expect to save money on their energy and water bills. Standard materials used in retrofitting include new insulation along with insulated impact glass and a solar hot water heater. Just these three things can significantly improve energy efficiency and save a homeowner between 30 and 50 percent on their electric bill.

MyGreenBuildings.com has committed itself to being a forerunner in Sarasota’s sustainable movement. Ellis and his partner, Grant Castilow, were selected as the contractor for “The Florida House” to help coordinate the green retrofit of the home in its new location. All of their work is being donated to this project. Castilow chairs the Building Committee, and Ellis spends time with the Steering Committee. MyGreenBuildings will pull the necessary permits, and provide the Florida House with the helpful oversight and act as point coordinator of the many subcontractors working on this important project that will upgrade the green home with technologies and systems that are current to today’s standards. The home will then be a model for sustainable retrofitting. The company also has other amazing green projects throughout Sarasota, including both new and retrofit projects on Siesta Key, Casey Key, Venice Island, and other Sarasota mainland neighborhoods.

Ellis likes the byproduct of his past and present business ventures. “I want my five year old daughter to be proud of her Dad, and recognize that he and the people of his generation made a difference by helping others to establish a better way of life, sustainably and in an environmentally friendly way. Ellis is successful because he loves what he does, builds an excellent product with whole systems design, and uses the best technology and talented architects. He is very passionate about construction and the relationships he builds along the way. “I really love working with people and I get to do it every day in this business,” concludes Ellis.

Contact Stephen Ellis at MyGreenBuildings located at 3512 S. Osprey Ave., 2nd Floor, Suite C in Sarasota. Call 941-366-7280 or email info@mygreenbuildings.com.



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