



Our Wonderful World

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The Art of Living Green 



THE SUSTAINABILITY SWEET SPOT

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What do a hard working single father with three beautiful children, a battery and tire company, Christian housing organization, green building nonprofit and Catholic high school all have in common? Give up? The answer is the first LEED-certified home built in Fort Pierce, Florida by the St. Lucie County Habitat for Humanity. As the Chair of the Palm Beach Branch of the U.S. Green Building Council South Florida Chapter and green building consultant, a LEED Habitat Home is a very exciting prospect for me, and being able to participate in this one was a dream come true.

All homes should be built with ongoing efficiency as a requirement, as well as solid construction with reduced environmental impact and improved indoor environmental quality for the occupants. But this home is even more special than that. This home is not only pursuing LEED Green Building Certification, but this project hits the sustainability sweet spot.

Let me explain...

This Habitat home was built in large part by high school students. Yes, high school students — and it's not their first time. Well, unless they were a freshman this year.

This year, 2011, for the fifth straight year in a row, the Miller family of St. Lucie Battery & Tire has donated \$50,000 to St. Lucie Habitat for Humanity to work in partnership with John Carroll Catholic High School (JCHS) to build a home for a deserving family in Fort Pierce. The Le Grandeur family will be the recipients of this incredible testament to the St. Lucie County and John Carroll community. Why do I say the John Carroll Community? Because Joe Miller, the major donor to



this project, is an alumni, as is his son, and his grandson attends John Carroll today. The main overseer of this project is a man who teaches religious studies at John Carroll High School named Dominick Scotto.

Scotto is not only the relayer of scripture and verse, but if you watch him on the construction site he teaches all life skills. His attitude embodies the idea that if you give a man a fish he will have food for one night, but teach a man to fish

and he will never go hungry. If Scotto's kids are hungry it is merely for more of his teaching for he teaches compassion, fairness, self-worth and equality to all of the students, as well as the adults on the project wise enough to learn from him.

Sustainability is defined by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as meeting the needs of today while ensuring that future generations will be able to meet their needs tomorrow. The

concept in business terms is often depicted as a Venn Diagram in which three circles intersect in the sweet spot known as sustainability. The circles are made up of the three P's: People, Planet and Profit. People represent the Community in which a business, organization, or project exists, both the internal community and external. Planet refers to the environment and resources the business, organization or project utilizes to operate or affects with its end result, whether it is a product or service. Profit, of course, refers to the economics of the business, organization, or project. Keep in mind, if the economics are not positive and just create financial depletion, sustainability is impossible. The same holds true for the other two P's, Planet and People. The Habitat for Humanity project takes the concept of sustainability to its highest form.

First let's look at the People aspect of the project. As described in the opening paragraph, students, community leaders, businesses, nonprofit organizations and a family all came together to make this project happen. The Miller family and their employees as well as their customers all supported and enabled this project to make it possible. Habitat for Humanity provided the vehicle to secure the property, build the home and



identify a deserving family in need of a better life. John Carroll High School supplied the manpower, the growth and educational opportunities for the students, and the interest of the Miller family to begin with. The US Green Building Council (USGBC) provided the knowledge to make the home green, the expertise of inspectors and the verification that a green, energy water and resource efficient home was achieved, as well as some suppliers that provided discounted materials and services. All of these stakeholders participated in the ways they could to provide the Le Grandeur family and the Fort Pierce community with a lovely place to call home.

The next circle in the Venn Diagram is Planet, or the environmental aspects of the project. This home was built using a tremendous amount of salvaged goods from the Habitat

Restore, giving second life to products that may have ended up in the landfill. A solar hot water heater, partially donated by Solaris Energy, was installed to take advantage of Florida's climate while reducing the amount of energy needed to heat the water provided to the home.

The air conditioning system has a SEER (energy efficiency) rating of 16, also contributing to reduced energy use when it comes to cooling the home. Two rain barrels were painted by the students in the



JCHS environmental club and installed for rain-water harvesting so the plantings on site could be irrigated without using precious potable water. All paints used on the project were low VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) so that the painters and occupants of the home were not exposed to high limits of chemicals and toxins. This is very important, particularly if the occupants are sensitive to external contaminants. The construction and demolition debris was placed in a recycle bin so that each time it was

emptied as much as 92% of the waste was diverted from the landfill and reintroduced into the marketplace for reuse.

Finally we talk Profit. How is a project like this profitable? In reality, it's not; however, the profitability of this home lies in the reduced operating costs and the donated funding. Most homeowners have a deep understanding of the financial burden an inefficient home can have. A mortgage payment can be difficult enough to handle,

but the high cost of living these days adds a whole other layer of stress and bills. The strategies used in the design, construction, building materials and systems in the Le Grandeur home is projected to reduce operation costs by 35 – 40% from a standard home of similar size. That translates to hundreds of dollars in savings each year, which means more money to put towards other things such as food, clothing and education. As for the other stakeholders in the project, the students at JCHS have an understanding of how a house works, what is entailed in its construction and how it is meant to function, enabling them to be more cognizant of problems if and when they arise in their own homes one day. They also have developed a deep appreciation for giving to, and positively affecting, others.

St. Lucie Habitat for Humanity, an organization founded upon the principle of sustaining hard working families in need, has taken that foundation of sustainability to the next level — not only affording a home for a good family, but providing strategies for affordable operations and maintenance of the home. The Miller family and other business donors to the project are eligible for tax breaks tied to their incredible generosity.

Psychic income shouldn't be discounted either. That's the income one gets from feeling really good about something they've done. And finally, the US Green Building Council gets another green home to add to its portfolio and moves one step closer to their mission

of making green buildings available to everyone within a generation.

Sustainability is about taking all stakeholders into consideration and remembering that Mother Earth is a stakeholder in our actions, too. If every undertaking, business, project, organization, product, etc. was planned and developed while viewing each component under the lens of sustainability, undoubtedly we would not be in the economic crisis we are in today.

John Carroll High School (administration, teachers and students), the Miller Family, the US Green Building Council and St. Lucie Habitat for Humanity all achieved that sweet spot we call sustainability. But if you ask any JCHS student, they will tell you, the sweetest spot to the entire project is the spot the Le Grandeur Family will call home. 🌍

