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Green building group pitches energy efficiency to Treasure Coast

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FORT PIERCE — Making homes and offices more energy-efficient is starting to gain more traction on the Treasure Coast, “green building” experts say.

“Green building,” whether in new construction or updating existing buildings, “is the one sector of the construction industry that is still busy, even in Florida,” said Robert Cannellos, president of the South Florida chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council.

Cannellos was among about 50 people at the meeting of the council’s Treasure Coast branch Thursday night at Indian River State College’s Corporate & Community Training Institute. Among the group were builders, developers, subcontractors and consultants.

Green building is “moving a little slower up here (in the Treasure Coast) and some of it has to do with the smaller population and the lack of government incentives, compared with counties farther south,” Cannellos said.

“We’ve got to learn to sell energy efficiency,” Danny Orlando, Southeast regional manager for the Energy Star program, which the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency started in 1993, told the group. “We don’t do that. We sell granite countertops and tray ceilings and garden tubs.”

Consumer demand for energy-efficient homes is not yet strong, Orlando said.

“If the consumers demand it, the builders will build it, but they’re not demanding it,” he said. “Why is energy the only thing I can think of that the first thing the consumer will say is, ‘What’s the payback?’”

“Payback isn’t only money,” Orlando said. “People buy things all the time that have long-term savings.”

Consumers are confused by the various ratings systems for energy-efficient products, several people said.

“Consumers don’t know the quality of the manufacturers, so wouldn’t it be nice to have one rating system that builders can use to compare?” said John Drndak, president of Vero Beach-based Climactic Solar.

Not everyone puts cost savings as their highest priority, but as a builder you've got to be able to sell the cost savings on each project," said Ryan Strom, a vice president at the Stuart office of Team Parks. The result of a merger in January of Parks Co. Inc. and Team South Construction LLC, Team Parks does commercial, residential and development projects throughout Florida and south Georgia.

The financial costs, or long-term savings, are "hands-down the most important factor for 90 percent of our customers," Strom said.



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