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DEPOT WALK IN ORANGE

OC homes go green But does doing good for the environment boost builders' bottom lines?

By Kelly St. John

From Anaheim, to Orange, to San Juan Capistrano, new home communities are going green. The question remains whether environmental friendliness can support builders' bottom lines. But if interest is any gauge of success, going green could also bring in the green.

Take the response Newport Beach-based builder John Laing Homes got from an email blast sent to prospective buyers. None got a greater response than one touting a home development's environmental features, says Linda Mamet, the company's vice president of sales and marketing. Now, during a housing slump, green is a big plus when marketing to young buyers, who tend to have a strong interest in the environment.

"Certainly, the buyers like the prospects of reducing energy costs," along with the principles of a higher social purpose, says Bill Holford, Southern California regional president for Seal Beach-based Olson Homes. "Even more, mature empty nesters are starting to take a strong look at what they purchase."

While the trend is still emerging, homebuyers have a lot of choices. Olson recently opened sales on its Depot Walk homes in Orange – the first housing project in Orange County to be certified by the U.S. Green Building Council with a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) rating, meaning the development meets strict building standards. Depot Walk's homes are powered by solar energy; built walking distance from shopping and Orange's train depot; and include features like water-saving, dual-flush toilets, recycled glass, nontoxic, paints, low-watt fluorescent lighting and bamboo flooring.

In Anaheim, Brookfield Homes' Colony Park won a GreenPoint Rated

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certification from a nonprofit Berkeley group, Build It Green. Meanwhile, several Orange County cities – including Irvine and Anaheim – have adopted voluntary green-building guidelines.

And John Laing Homes is developing 3 green communities in Orange County, including 2 in San Juan Capistrano. Best of all, Mamet says, “Green development doesn’t have to cost more.”

Such homes attract 3 kinds of customers: those with a philosophical interest in the environment; people who want to lower energy costs; and folks concerned about their health and well-being, and are drawn to features like nontoxic paints and formaldehyde-free wood products. Surprised? Mamet isn’t: “When you see Al Gore winning the Nobel Peace Prize, you realize this is an important topic to people in their lives.” **OCM**

Kelly St. John is OC METRO Business Magazine’s real estate columnist.

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