



# Home Builders Association of St. Louis & Eastern Missouri Green Building Council

## Hints, Tips and Advice from the St. Louis HBA

- Find passionate builders, educate them, and then let their passion and enthusiasm inspire others.
- Budget the necessary time to develop a solid infrastructure within your HBA to support the program.
- Partner with the GBI early in the process; seek their advice and utilize their resources.
- Consider partnering with neighboring HBAs. This makes it simpler for builders who operate throughout the region. Smaller HBAs can leverage the strengths offered by larger HBAs that already have programs in place.
- Don't get lost in the small stuff.
- Involve associate members and set up a sponsorship model that's a "win win" for all.
- The press loves stories about green building. Issue press releases for media attention—but don't go to the press too soon. You don't want to create more demand for green verified homes than you can realistically deliver.
- To raise awareness of the program, develop a green home tour that's separate from your usual Parade of Homes.



## What Does the Future Hold?

For Belcher and Loos, the goal is to make sure that Green Building Initiative – St. Louis remains one of the “top” local programs in the country—and to serve as a model for other HBAs looking to start their own programs, especially within the region.

“Among other things, we’d like to see other Missouri HBAs adopt programs like ours in order to speak with one voice when dealing with state legislative issues,” said Belcher. But, more important, we have a terrific program that benefits builders, home owners and the environment, and we’d like to see those same benefits spread across the state.”



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## The Birth of a Green Building Program

Long before the Home Builder Association of St. Louis & Eastern Missouri unveiled its local green building program, it identified the need to establish a Green Building Council to support its builder members as they sought to develop more sustainable homes.

In January 2005, Matt Belcher, president of Belcher Homes, was approached by Patrick Sullivan, executive director of the HBA of St. Louis & Eastern Missouri, and asked to chair the newly developing committee. Belcher was involved in the National Association of Home Builders' (NAHB) Green Building Subcommittee and was known widely as a passionate supporter of the green building movement. He agreed to champion the effort and has since helped to create an exemplary green building program.

In the beginning, the Green Building Council was intentionally weighted to have six builders and three associate members. "You need people that understand on a practical level what's needed from a green building program and are committed to seeing it through," said Steve Loos, senior staff vice president for Association Services. "Construction knowledge is critical when trying to analyze which guidelines to use as the basis of the program, and their applicability to the local climate and market." One of the first orders of business for the new Council was its decision to adopt the NAHB's Model Green Home Building Guidelines, which it chose to do, after much review and deliberation, without modification. (The guidelines also form the basis of the NAHB's soon-to-be-released American National Standard.) The Council also developed a checklist to streamline the point tracking process—a move Belcher now calls "an invaluable time saver."

The Council launched its new program, The Green Building Initiative – St. Louis, in October 2005 and verified its first green home in July 2006. In 2007, an additional nine homes were verified.

About 8% of the HBA's builder members currently participate in the program. However, that number is expected to grow substantially as more consumers seek homes that provide the environmental, health and cost benefits associated with green features.

## Why the Program Works

In addition to a dedicated HBA staff, motivated builders and supportive associate members, Belcher and Loos agree that a major reason for the program's success is the credibility created by independent third-party verification. To encourage energy efficiency in their community, the local gas company, Laclede Gas, partnered with the HBA to verify homes built to the program guidelines. The Green Building Initiative provided classroom and field training, and Laclede engineers now conduct on-site inspections at the rough-in stage and again when a home is completed. Inspectors assess each home based on a checklist that includes all possible points in each category, which they review during both visits to ensure nothing is missed.

When asked about the verification process, Loos had this to say: "requiring at least two on-site visits may have slowed us down in terms of the number of homes verified, but it helps to ensure a high quality product. Laclede Gas has been a huge contributor to the success of the program. They donated manpower and other resources to help us set up the checklist and they provide all of our in-field inspections."

## Lessons Learned from the St. Louis Program

- Recruit a small group of dedicated builders interested in developing a local program.
- Select one builder passionate about green building to champion the program and guide it to completion.
- Start with a small committee comprised of mainly builders. As the committee gains momentum and interest grows, shift to the builder/associate ratio most applicable to your membership.
- Partner with the GBI for expertise and guidance, utilize the tools available, and reach out to other HBAs who already have successful programs.
- Develop a green building subcommittee to determine whether the NAHB guidelines are appropriate for your local program needs, or need to be adjusted.
- Approach your local utility company about partnering in a third-party verification process.
- Seek out potential green home verifiers. Many home energy raters are also qualified by the NAHB to verify green homes.

## Getting into the Green Mindset

Building green is good for the environment and it's good for business. By participating in a local green building program, like GBI – St. Louis, builders can create a competitive advantage over those who aren't yet equipped to integrate sustainability features into their homes—which savvy consumers are increasingly demanding.

Many also find that the program's guidelines help them to become more efficient builders. "The guidelines have made me more efficient by creating an infrastructure/road map for me to follow," said Belcher.

Another motivating factor is the reality that green building standards will likely become codified in the near future. Societal demand is putting pressure on local municipalities to consider green building as a part of their local building requirements. The American National Standards Institute is reviewing a new version of the NAHB guidelines for publication later this year as a National Green Building Standard (NGBS)—which will be readily adoptable at both the state and local level. Builders who develop and participate in a green building program have an opportunity, not only to adjust and benefit from these changes before they're required by law, but to influence the development of local legislation.

## Growing the Program

High on the list of priorities for the Green Building Council is how to increase the number of builders participating in the program—which, according to Belcher, requires both consumer outreach and builder education.

Recent examples of consumer outreach include the second annual HBA Tour of Green Homes, hosted by the St. Louis HBA, and a green builder pavilion at St. Louis Builders Home and Garden Show, which is the largest show of its kind in the U.S. The 2008 HBA Tour of Green Homes included 13 homes ranging in price from \$103,000 to \$2.2 million. It attracted hundreds of potential home buyers interested in seeing the variety of homes that have been or are in the process of being locally verified in accordance with the NAHB guidelines.

In terms of builder education, the HBA wants people to know that green building can be both practical and cost effective. Among other things, it is taking advantage of materials produced by GBI to support local programs, such as the new green building incentives database, which provides information on green building rebates, tax credits and other financial incentives offered by federal, state and local governments and utilities. Other examples include virtual training opportunities, case studies and PowerPoint presentations, marketing collateral and research reports.

## *"We didn't reach out to legislators,"*

says Loos, "but we should have—and I highly recommend it to anyone developing a local green building program. Make sure your state and local governments know you have a program in place so they can bring you into the conversations they're having about building industry legislation and incentives. If builders are proactive about implementing credible green building programs that are voluntary, there's less need for government leaders to create laws that mandate specific practices."

## Challenges

Adopting a green building philosophy is not an easy task for some builders. It is especially difficult for production builders that have competitive price pressures and tight construction and production schedules. Production builders can't simply change a product line in the middle of a subdivision. "They're selling what they already have priced out, so to add green features throws a wrench in their system," says Loos. "Nonetheless, some production builders have taken an interest and are now seriously planning and building green subdivisions."

"Traditionally it has been easier for custom builders," adds Belcher. "They have more flexibility to make changes because they build a few homes at a time and price out the features individually. However most builders, including production builders, are incorporating more features than most of them realize, due to the proliferation of green products on the market."

Educating vendors is also a critical element to success. The task of training installers to perform a job to the same green specifications every time takes effort and forethought. To them, delivering on time and on budget is just as important as getting the green specs right. The bottom line is that green building doesn't have to cost more—but it does require planning. As with any new process, there is a learning curve associated with green building. "It's not so simple to just jump in and go green without reorganizing and adjusting some of your policies and procedures," said Belcher. "But it also isn't as difficult as some people think, and it's well worth the effort."