



Cover story: Changing attitudes



COURTESY PHOTOS

Epoch Homes in Pembroke has built several mansions in the Northeast, including this one in Southport, Conn.

Buyers embrace modular mansions

Goodbye, social stigma: The owner of Epoch Homes in Pembroke says cost-effective construction is helping his industry.

By **DAN O'BRIEN** Union Leader Correspondent 7/9/10

PEMBROKE — Some industry estimates say home construction is down 70 percent since 2006. And as people wanting new homes search for cheaper alternatives, many are ignoring long-held social stigmas about modular homes.

"There used to be some stigma with modular homes," said John Ela, owner of Epoch Homes in Pembroke. "People would mistake them for mobile homes."

Ela says the modular home industry has suffered less than traditional home construction companies due to cost-effectiveness and expediency.

It's also helped that options with modular homes have grown by leaps and bounds in recent years.

In fact, Epoch has been recognized in publications for building several mansions in the Northeast, all of which are modular. Those include a 16,000-square-foot home in Greenwich, Conn. and a 12,700-square-foot abode near a beach on Cape Cod.



Unlike years ago, modular homes are not all cookiecutter. These days, many home buyers work with builders, sometimes architects, to design the perfect modular home.

“(Modular) used to mean you’d have a trade-off,” Ela said. “You just had to pick one plan out of a small list. Now, the sky’s the limit.”

The Greenwich mansion was built by putting together 33 modules that were delivered to the site in three phases. It’s the largest home Epoch has ever built.

The fastest job Epoch ever completed was a secondstory addition to a home in Nashua that took 10 days from start to finish. An average house takes a month or two.

“It might take two or three months if it’s a very complicated house,” Ela said. “It would have taken a year to build” on site.

With 50 employees, Epoch builds about 80 homes a year. Some are elaborate but many are modest or moderately sized, including a colonial being trucked to a family here in Pembroke in the coming weeks.

Ela said Epoch acts as a subcontractor for the builders of the homes. Builders are in charge of foundations, hook-ups to water and sewer, and getting local building permits.

Ela says the process of building the home in block sections in a factory then delivering them to a construction site is cheaper, faster and more environmentally friendly than traditional “stick building,” when construction workers build the home on site.

“We can control the environment and control waste,” Ela said. “It’s quicker because they’re spending

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This Greenwich, Conn., mansion was built by putting together 33 modules delivered to the site in three phases.

F₂Mansions

less time renting some place while their house is being built. They're spending less time paying that construction loan."

Because the entire structure is being built in a factory, Ela said pieces of leftover wood can be used on another project, rather than discarded like at a typical construction site. He also said the spray-foam insulation is better at keeping in heat than normal insulation.

A six-bedroom, 8½-bath mansion in New Canaan, Conn., being showcased on Epoch's website touts the home's energy efficiency, saying the home uses 62 percent less than a traditionally built home of its size.