

Westport News



Westport modular custom-built homes, a green alternative

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Sustainability and savings are two attractive perks when purchasing "green" modular homes.

"What we try to do is build energy efficient, maintenance free homes," said Jim Hines, owner of Westport Modular Homes and JMK Consulting Group. "Once it's up, it's done."

Hines is responsible for designing, managing and installing modular homes made by Epoch Homes of New Hampshire.

Part of his company's overall "green" initiative, these environmentally-friendly structures are made with high-quality materials, including new glues, paints and sealants containing low VOC levels.

Using a Icynene soft foam insulation that is sprayed on -- along with high performance windows -- the modular homes are "tight," and there is little heat or cool air escaping outside, said Hines.

Dr. David Downie, director of Fairfield University's Program on the Environment and associate professor of politics, agreed that home energy efficiency is an important environmental and economic issue today.

"The United States could significantly reduce its energy use, save money, improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions if we improve the energy efficiency of our homes," he noted.

In fact, he stated that businesses, such as Westport Modular, are fulfilling an important consumer need. Moreover, he anticipates that similar companies will emerge as energy costs continue to escalate.

Certified by the National Association of Home Builders, Hines is recognized as a "green" builder in the industry. The materials from Epoch are designed to last a lifetime, he added.

The exterior of the home contains a "baked on enamel" siding that does not fade or become damaged in any way by external elements, such as the weather.

"If you like the color of your house, you wouldn't have to paint it for at least 18 to 20 years," Hines said. "In a normal house, you would be painting it every four years."

Also, every bit of space in the customized modular houses he creates is used to the fullest.

Referring to an 11,000-square-foot house Hines recently built in New Canaan, he pointed out that the asphalt roof is guaranteed to last for 99 years or a lifetime.

"A standard roof, though, must be replaced every 30 years or so," Hines said. "Because of its sustainability, there is less materials going into landfills."

Based on the anticipated cost savings for heat, air conditioning and hot water, "green" modular houses can also resourcefully stretch homeowners' dollars. Although the asking price for the New Canaan home is \$3.49 million, the buyer can expect a 78.4 percent annual savings on energy bills, Hines said.

According to Home Energy Technologies of Chester, the residence has earned the Energy STAR status for its geothermal heating and cooling systems. As a result, the heating bill per year is anticipated to be \$1,280, as opposed to a code-built house's annual cost of \$7,464.

"This house does not get heated with any fossil fuel," Hines said.

He pointed out that these savings are the result of the building's insulation, overall "tightness" and construction practices. Other energy efficient features in the New Canaan house are low float toilets and LED lighting.

"When we design the home with the owner, we encourage them to utilize the attic and basement spaces," Hines added. "We try to incorporate a stairway into the conditioned

attic space, whereas in some houses the attic is not heated or cooled and it's essentially just used for storage. You have the space, so you might as well use it."

Using a computer aided design program (CAD), the Epoch Corporation allows homeowners to fully customize modular homes, mansions and cottages. The modular is then created in a New Hampshire factory that Hines likens to an automobile facility.

"Again, nothing is wasted," he said. "Any wood that is not used is either sent out to a local high school's woodworking department or put in a bin for people to take home and use."

The fact that the modular homes are built indoors provides additional benefits, Hines said. Since construction takes place in a controlled environment, the house is not exposed to the elements and thereby is protected against potential negative impacts, such as mold. Also, Hines noted, there is a reduced impact to traffic flow around the property when the structure is built. Unlike a traditional construction project, modular homes are assembled in a shorter amount of time.

"I think that is a key point -- timing is everything," he said.

Westport Modular is responsible for all of the zoning permits and variances that must be obtained from a municipality for each project. Hines is also in charge of bidding out necessary site work, overseeing the project and supervising its construction.

"I then make sure that all of the inspections are done properly and on time," he said.

For more information about Westport Modular, call 203-341-9165 or log onto www.westportmodular.com

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