

Now It's Easy To Be Green At Sanford's Creek, Colfax

by Zoe Murphy
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Building green was definitely out of the ordinary just 10 years ago. Today, however, more and more builders, as well as entire communities, are embracing the idea of sustainability in their building practices. Leading the way in this new direction is a community in Colfax – Sanford's Creek.

Sanford's Creek was certified in early July by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) as the first "green" subdivision in North Carolina. It is only the fourth certified green subdivision in the entire county. "The primary criteria for the green certification is having an environmentally responsible site design and development," explained Gil Vaughan, Realtor, ecobroker and NAHB Certified Green Professional with Yost & Little Realty Inc.

According to Vaughan, to create an environmentally responsible site, the builder/designer has to create plans that do not have a significant impact on the area's natural resources, including wildlife and water. Vaughan added, "We like to say that we have left the land in the same or better condition then when we found it, while we are creating an environmentally friendly, sustainable and healthy place to live."

Sanford's Creek features 32 custom home sites, on 40 acres of land. All of the homes will be built to Energy Star standards. Some will be certified green as well. The homes are priced from the mid-\$300,000s and start at 2,300 square feet. Each home plan will have three of four bedrooms. Currently there are 10 existing homes built and another under construction.

The designer and builder who created the vision for Sanford's Creek is Gary Silverstein. Vaughan explained that while the green building standards were not even established until last year, development on Sanford's Creek began more than three years ago.

"Gary Silverstein is the only builder and he is very environmentally conscious," Vaughan said. "He was really ahead of his time, since the standards came out after he started building – he had the vision for the development."

For Silverstein, the NAHB certification is important because it is from an impartial third party. "Anyone can say they are building a green home or that they have a green product, but the certification is critical to the process because then the potential homeowner knows that a third party has examined the home and that the home meets the third party's standards."

Silverstein explained that Sanford's Creek is zoned as a rural preservation district. "We set aside half of the land as a natural common area and we are building homes on the other half." Within the natural common area, Silverstein has been especially sensitive to the ecosystem – the woods, the wildlife, the creek. "All of it is very important to us, and being sensitive to those areas and maintaining them is critical to our mission."

Concern for the environment also extends to the materials used in the construction of each home. "We are looking at the materials we use in the houses so that they are made from as many recycled materials as possible," Silverstein said. Examples of some of the recycled materials that are going into the homes of Sanford's Creek are Trex decking, which is made from recycled soda bottles, and cellulose insulation, which is made from recycled newspapers. "They are all better products that we find to be a better choice, not only because of their recycled content, but also because they are more sustainable and will last longer and perform better," Silverstein said.

Other green aspects of the new homes in Sanford's Creek are the use of dual flush toilets in some of the homes, as well as green label carpeting made from recycled soda bottles, and bamboo floors.

Equally important is recycling the materials that are used on the job. Everything from scrap wood to dry wall to aluminum can be recycled. Silverstein said that all leftover or waste materials from each building site are sorted to see what can be recycled. "We are finding that around 50 percent of the materials that have gone in the waste stream are recyclable. That is significant."

Another area Silverstein considers when designing and building homes, such as the ones in Sanford's Creek, is the indoor air quality of the homes. "We are concerned about volatile compounds from paints," he said. "We want the homes to be a healthy environment for the homeowner and their family to live in." Part of that, Silverstein said, is educating home owners so that they can better maintain their homes after they have moved in. "We want the homeowner to benefit from all the efforts we put into the home when we were building it."

Silverstein has sought to lessen Sanford's Creek's impact on the environment by building in a way that is as time sensitive as possible. "That is so things are disturbed for as short an amount of time," he said. "If construction happens rapidly, then things like erosion are kept to a minimum."

One final way that Silverstein seeks to give back to the environment is by creating a respect for the greater community. "What we're looking to do is not only create green neighborhoods, but green communities with respect for the environment and each other," Silverstein said. Part of this philosophy means insuring that Sanford's Creek is in harmony with its surrounding neighbors.

The community hopes to foster that sense of mutual respect and community through sharing the development's walking trail. "We share the trail with Horsepower, a nonprofit therapeutic center that takes handicapped kids, mostly, and works with them through the medium of horses," he said. "Hopefully we are creating a community with Horsepower. We don't want to create islands of neighborhoods. We want there to be inter-connectedness between all the different communities here," Silverstein said.