

Green road trip! Builders unite for conference

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This year Raleigh was the host city for the National Association of Home Builders' 12th annual Green Building Conference, where like-minded building industry professionals share ideas and strategies related to green construction. Education is the focus — a wide variety of concurrent seminars are offered, and suppliers and manufacturers of green products display their wares in an exhibit hall.

As the builder of the first NAHB-certified green subdivision in North Carolina, approved in 2009, I was asked to speak about how I achieved this certification. Though I am a builder, not a public speaker, I was honored and excited to share my experiences with my peers. So I arrived in Raleigh as a presenter and a builder, prepared to both teach and learn.

The May conference kicked off with a tour of green homes, an event designed to showcase the host city's sustainable building options. It is a credit to our state that we have so many examples of green homes, representing many sustainable trends in our industry. The six homes on the tour featured a wide array of green projects. There were custom high-end houses in urban and rural settings that included spray foam insulation, high-efficiency HVAC equipment, solar panels and rainwater collection systems, as well as in-town affordable projects, proving that "sustainable best building practices" are achievable in all homes.

One home that I found particularly compelling was built by Builders of Hope. According to [buildersofhopenc.org](#), the nonprofit's mission is to "increase the availability of high-quality, safe, affordable housing for working families. Incorporating economic benefits, environmental stewardship and social solutions, Builders of Hope sustainably revitalizes at-risk communities." What I found most intriguing about their approach was the effort to renovate abandoned homes. Structures that could have been destined for a landfill instead become fully remodeled high-performing affordable homes for deserving families. This truly is recycling at its best.

John Replogle, president and CEO of Durham-based Burt's Bees, gave the keynote speech titled, "People, Planet and Profits." While not a construction company, Burt's Bees' natural personal care products are created with a focus on environmental responsibility. According to Replogle, the Burt's Bees business model "links our commitment to well-being, sustainability and social equity, and governs all aspects of the business from the bottom up to the top down, connecting grass roots with grass tops."

He was also very clear on the point that "sustainable best practices can be a powerful driver of competitive advantage, increased productivity and bottom-line performance." This message, a reminder as to why we attended the conference in the broadest sense, was an excellent way to start our next few days of learning.

The meat and potatoes — or tofu and brown rice — of the conference were the wide assortment of seminars. These classes afforded me the opportunity to expand my knowledge so that I could improve my business strategies and techniques. Detailed cutting-edge learning sessions were taught by leading authorities on improving energy efficiency and addressing moisture issues, indoor air quality, water efficiency, renovations and multi-family projects.

Engaging conversation and debate were integral elements of most of the classes I attended. Of particular interest to me and many of my colleagues was information about the new 2011 Energy Star Qualified Homes Specifications. As of today there are more than 1 million U.S. homes that have earned Energy Star certification, according to energystar.gov. This represents significant reduction in American home energy use. The 2011 updates will offer a more comprehensive approach, paying closer attention to water management issues and ramping up the requirements for energy efficiency.

As for my spiel, I presented with a developer of a certified green subdivision from Michigan and a land use expert from the NAHB Research Center. We discussed our philosophies and approaches toward developing certified green neighborhoods. We talked about the strategies used in protecting the forests and creeks that highlight our neighborhoods, and the benefits of creating community through these natural features. While the subject matter may not be as riveting as “Iron Man 2,” I believe our impassioned, sincere presentation reinforced many of the points that the keynote speaker made earlier in the conference.

What did I take home with from the conference? I learned many new building techniques to apply to my projects back home. I learned to stay current with new successful green building strategies. I learned to keep engaged in the process of improving my methods. And, finally, I was reminded to always remember that we are stewards of all our undertakings and to treat work, people and the environment with the deep respect they deserve.