

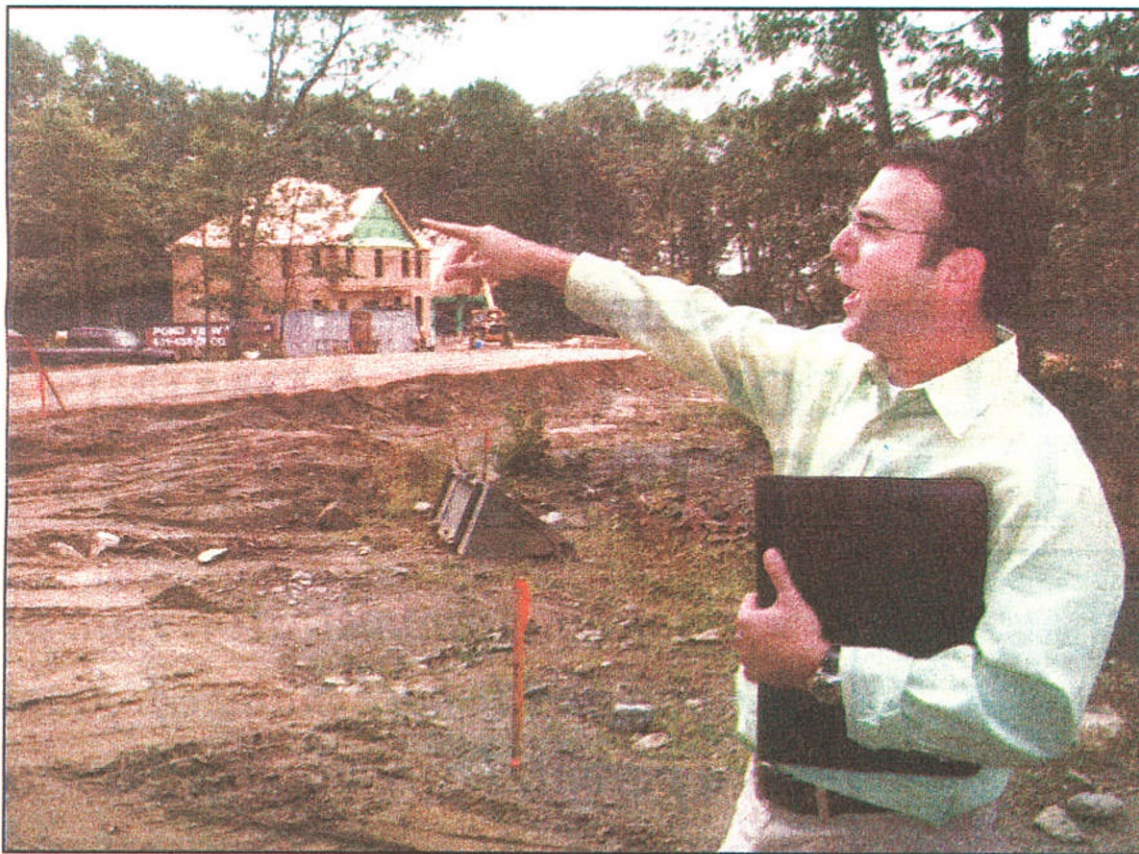
The Valley Breeze

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'Green for the mainstream'



New homes incorporate pre-fabricated, insulated walls

By **MARCIA GREEN**
Valley Breeze Editor

CUMBERLAND - Calling it "green for the mainstream," 30-year-old Joseph Samra III is building an eight-house subdivision on four acres between Blissdale Avenue and Old Mendon Road that he says will save 50 percent of the natural gas that typical homes consume for winter heating.

The chief energy-saving component is the structural insulated panel (SIP) system produced by Branch River Plastics Inc. in Smithfield.

The product, that replaces traditional "stick construction," is not new but finding a new market in a "green" nation where saving energy

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Developer Joseph Samra III of Cumberland explains the layout of his new eight-home development off Overhill Road, Cumberland, to visitors last week. The first home, using new, energy-efficient wall panels, is now under construction in the background and will open to visitors Sunday.

Valley Breeze photo by Tom Ward

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is paramount, says company owner Robert Mayo.

Samra is showing off his first house this Sunday, noon to 4 p.m. at the site he calls The Wooded Acres at Overhill. It's located off Overhill Road on the new Armas Court.

He calls it "the first green neighborhood in Rhode Island."

The son of a local dentist, Samra is a marketing professional who thinks his green approach to building is just what his generation is seeking.

Cumberland Building Official Ray Madden, who incorporated some of the same techniques in his Gloucester Cape seven years ago, agrees.

Samra describes the insulated SIPs panels as "an ice cream sandwich" of six inches of styrofoam-like material sandwiched between two half-inch sheets of oriented strand board (better known as OSB).

"It offers twice as much insulation as the average home," he says.

Madden says he was first in Rhode Island to use the SIP system instead of the usual plywood and studs when building his 2,700-square-foot Cape seven years ago.

"The problem with a stud wall," says the building inspector, "is the studs. They're not as efficient as you think they are," he says, because cold travels through them.



Developer Joseph Samra, right, displays the Green Guard housewrap that helps shed water behind the outside surface of a home. At left is a cut-away of an SIP panel that is made up of styrofoam between two wall panels and offers twice the protection from the cold of typical stud wall systems.

Still, he says, he sees the standard building technique continuing all over town.

"We're a bunch of Yankees. We're stuck so far in the past we can't see it."

The SIPs panels Samra is using are strong and link together so fast, says Madden, that he and his wife had the first floor of their Gloucester home completed in 12 hours.

Last year Madden's house needed 700 gallons of oil for the winter for heat and no air conditioning.

Samra's first house, which is still only roughed in so that the curious can see its bones, will eventually be occupied by his sister. He plans a house in the same subdivision for his family, too.

The Samra siblings grew up on nearby Old Mendon Road. He's a 1997 graduate of Cumberland High School.

His family company, a 35-year-old real estate holding firm, is called MEJJ Development, a tribute to his grandparents' initials. This is the company's first housing subdivision.

His houses are selling in the low- to mid-\$500,000 range, says Samra, a price that Samra says is targeted to a middle class buyer.

Other green features include an exterior Green Guard wrap under the siding that's grooved to allow water to better run off.

A tankless hot water heater, water saving faucets and a dual flush toilet that conserves water

by offering a choice of liquid or solid waste flushing.

The lawn sprinklers have a rain gauge built in, the carpeting is from recycled fibers, the hardwood floors come from sources certified as environmentally friendly.

Samra said he expects his houses to be the first in Rhode Island to achieve National Green Building Program certification from the National Association of Home Builders. They're also rated as Energy Star homes, he said.

It's all about making selections and taking the time to do the research," says Samra.

"A green house is better built than a regular house," he says.

Check the company's Web site at mejdevelopment.com.