

Operation Home Delivery

Students and Habitat for Humanity Partner with Palm Harbor to Build Homes for Gulf Coast

In late June 2006, Dorinda Crews and her three children finally realized their dream to own a home. Helping to make that dream a reality was modular builder Palm Harbor Homes, Auburn University's College of Architecture, Habitat for Humanity and the Alabama Manufactured Housing Association.

Crews' home consists of two modular components joined by a great room built on-site by Crews, students, and volunteers from the Hale County, Ala., chapter of Habitat. Its innovative design allows Habitat to fulfill the sweat equity part of its program, and the organization plans to use it as a model for rebuilding homes on the Gulf Coast for victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Designed by Auburn University architecture students and faculty, the modular home—referred to as “The Breeze Way Home” by student designers—features a spacious front porch leading into the living room with rear double doors that open onto a deck. The high ceiling in the great room allows heat to rise and escape through vented windows near the ceiling, making the three-bedroom, one-bath home feel much larger than its 1,100 square feet. When the weather is right, air can move through the house, creating a breeze from the screened-in front porch through the great room and out the double doors, requiring no heating or cooling costs.

The home's two modular components contain bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchen, and were built at Palm Harbor's

Discovery Homes plant in Boaz, Ala.

This is the first project in which the Auburn School of Architecture has partnered with Habitat and the modular housing industry. They collaborated with the goal of building a house faster with less volunteer labor, while preserving the Habitat model of community building and keeping the cost within the budget of a typical Habitat home.

They created a home that is energy-efficient and durable and, therefore, more affordable in the long run. Not only that, but its architectural style is totally compatible with the Southern climate and cultural style.

“This is a pilot, a very serious pilot,” said Ken Mienert, who heads Habitat's Gulf Coast program, dubbed Operation Home Delivery. “This will be a major part of our initiative in hurricane recovery building.”

With more than 20,000 families, from Alabama to Texas, having qualified for Habitat homes due to damage from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Habitat already has more than 300 homes under construction and hopes to finish 1,000 by mid-2007. “The scale of this recovery effort is so large and the availability of local volunteers is not what it needs to be,” Mienert added. “The idea is that modular housing can leverage that labor.”



Auburn students competed in teams to design a home using modular building techniques. When one design was chosen, students went to work with Palm Harbor staff to refine the design and incorporate state-of-the-art, energy-efficient upgrades into the home. The students took care to position the home and its windows to maximize natural light while minimizing direct heating from sunlight. Reflective metal roofing and alternative siding were chosen for their energy savings and durability.



Palm Harbor's involvement brought both cost savings and skilled construction techniques to the project. With much of the work on the home completed in a factory setting, these benefits added significant value to the home. This was particularly important along the Gulf Coast, where construction projects are putting great demand on skilled construction tradesmen—making them expensive and hard to schedule.

Auburn professor David Hinson

observed that there would be real efficiency in starting more than one house at a time in nearby sites: "Since the crane was here to place the modules on the foundation and most of the crane's cost was in getting it here in Greensboro, [Ala.], we could have set two homes in a day with only a little added cost."

"I'm very confident that when we do it on the scale that we are going to do it, these homes will be cost effective," Mienert said. "They have proved we can adapt these homes. We think it is a

good fit. We are having some very serious discussions with some large modular producers."

Meanwhile, Crews and her three children have a new place to call home.

For more information on this project, contact David Hinson, Auburn University Associate Professor and Program Chair at 334-844-5438. For more information on Palm Harbor Homes, contact Charlie Hill at 800-933-7256 or visit online at www.discoverycustomhomes.com and www.palmharbor.com. ■