



# Green Building in the Capital Region

**T**he media has latched on to “Going Green” and put it into the popular consciousness. But I can tell you the green thing is not really new by any means. I included energy-efficiency and environmental sensitivity in college courses I was teaching in the mid 1970’s . . . and I was no innovator. I had lots of resources to draw upon, too, including some pertinent to building. Green goes back even further, at least to the 1960s, and its conceptual roots can be found growing decades earlier.

*Capital Region Building* specifically addressed green *building* in the magazine’s first year, 1997. In 2002 we dedicated an entire issue to the subject. The following year we did a cover story on Capital Construction. Frank Laskey’s company was not the first green-oriented builder in our region, but it may very well be the first to categorically promote itself as a green builder.

In 2000-2001, we were intricately involved in leading the development and construction of reportedly the first true Energy Star, green affordable home in the state. We did so in conjunction with Habitat for Humanity, the Schenectady Builders and Remodelers Association, NYSERDA, the National Association of Home Builders Research Center and a host of local suppliers, trades people and other volunteers. It raised some awareness that,

unfortunately, rather quickly drifted away. About the same time we also assisted in the first effort to establish green building guidelines in the state. It was a useful exercise and a few of us learned a great deal. One thing we learned was that the ideas were not going to spread very far until there was a greater sense of need. The need has now been demonstrated and those guidelines have been superseded by formulations of the U.S. Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (L.E.E.D.) and more recently the National Association of Home Builders, respectively, and others. Readers can easily find more information on them via the Internet.

So, what is the real status of green building in the Capital Region? First, put aside the stories you have read in the Sunday features sections of the newspapers. They are there because they have a news interest. In this case news interest due to their being unusual. Put aside the tabs and marketing inserts. It is trendy to write about green. But is green building really gaining a foothold in the local residential market?

Our search to identify area L.E.E.D. members turned up a few commercial contractors and a few architects, but no primarily residential contractors. However, Joe Rapp of Rapp Construction Management sent me his press release about his Hudson project,

the region’s most ambitious to date. His company along with Claverack Housing Ventures will be seeking L.E.E.D. certification for all the homes built in a 235-acre community in Claverack called The Stewardship at Millbrook Road. In support of the project Curtis Lumber has been selected as the project’s primary product supplier. Waste Management of Eastern New York has created a construction debris-recycling program to reduce construction waste by 60%. Correct Energy Environments, Inc. is providing spray foam insulation (made of soy and vegetable oils) for use in all the homes. The first two of 48 homes are currently under construction.

Via the Internet, one can find the names of local builders who have earned the National Association of Home Builders Certified Green Professional designation, (See NAHBgreen.org/directory. NAHB prohibits copying or distributing the information without its consent. We obtained the information via other means.). The program was officially introduced in February of this year so the list is short. As of July 1, 2008, within a 35-mile radius of Albany, five individuals had received certification: Paul Pipino (Pipino Builders, Clifton Park), Frank Barbera (Barbera Homes, Albany), Nicholas Schrader (Schrader and Company, Burnt Hills), Michael Roarke (Roarke Custom Home

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Builders, East Greenbush), and Brian McCormick (McCormick Carpentry, Galway)). A few other builders have told us they are in the process of obtaining certification.

The absence of certification does not mean there are no other competent contractors capable of building to green standards in the region. There are several stretching from Amsterdam to Lake George and back down the Northway to the Capital District. Joe Constantine (see his article beginning on page 24) is arguably the region's preeminent expert on hands-on green building. Other builders and building inspectors seek out his knowledge. (He will be speaking on the subject at the New York State Builders Show to be held at the Empire State Plaza Convention Center, September 11-12. See [www.nysba.com](http://www.nysba.com).)

The aforementioned Frank Laskey (who is seeking his NAHB certification) builds green in Loudon Ridge in the Town of Wilton and elsewhere. L.E.E.D.-certified architect Michael Phinney designed Laskey's first green homes and continues to work with him. Currently Laskey has five homes under construction at various levels of green. He is also in discussion with the National Association of Home Builders Research Center about a pilot project to build a home that would be 70% more energy efficient. Laskey, who built the first certified American Lung Association (ALA) healthy home in the Northeast, is dismayed, however, that the ALA dropped that green-related program.

Frank Barbera's Barbera Homes is among the few and perhaps the only well-established volume builder in the region to embrace green building via their advertising. The company went so far as to create a well-developed promotional campaign that offered financial incentives to prospective buyers who desire to go green. Frank said the campaign brought no direct sales but did put his company's capability into the minds of the public. He is willing to build green in any of the company's several developments. Furthermore, Barbera intends to build a 68-unit condo/townhouse project near The Crossings in Colonie at the NAHB entry or "bronze" green level. For customers who want to go to a "deeper shade of green" he will raise the level to silver or gold.

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