

**Paper: Toronto Star, The (Ontario, Canada)**  
**Title: Builders' show targets trends -**  
**Green living, boomers featured at U.S. showcase**  
**Date: February 17, 2007**

Baby boomers are dominating the housing market, the green movement is gaining huge momentum and urban living is enjoying a renaissance.

Those were some of the primary trends identified at the International Builders' Show presented by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) last week. The mammoth annual event - which is not open to the general public - drew 100,000 attendees from around the world and occupied more than one million square feet of floor space as 1,900 manufacturers and distributors of everything from appliances to shingles to insulation rolled out their latest products.

Only three cities in the U.S. have facilities big enough to accommodate the show: Orlando, Las Vegas and Chicago.

The show also had a mind-boggling array of educational seminars for builders and this year, green building and the 55-plus buyer were common themes: Designing for the Active Adult, Selling to Active Adults, What Boomers Want, the 50-Plus Community Vision, Active Adult Sales Boot Camp and You Don't Have to Go Weird to Go Green, Green Solutions for Green Spaces, Creating the Energy Efficient Community - A Builder's Journey and Sustainable Development, were just a sampling of the sessions offered.

If you listen to speakers like Tim McCarthy, baby boomers are the saviours of the battered U.S. housing market, which suffered its biggest decline in decades in the last quarter of 2006, when the new home market fell off by almost 30 per cent.

McCarthy is managing director of Traditions Capital, which builds, develops and manages an investment fund for developers and builders serving the 55-plus consumer.

"People over 55 are not deterred from buying if they have reached a stage in life where a move makes sense," McCarthy said.

"Usually their lifestyle has changed quickly (e.g. due to illness or physical infirmity) and whether the market goes up or down, they go to look for a house. Coast to coast, builders and developers targeting 55-plus buyers are doing well and will continue to thrive in this difficult economy."

But prying this group, which has more than half the wealth in the U.S., from their existing digs won't be easy, according to Paul Emrath, vice-president of housing policy research for the National Association of Home Builders.

"If you ask people over 55 about if they are happy where they are living, no matter what type of housing, they usually give say nine out of 10. It's a high bar to overcome to lure them away from their current housing."

As well as wealthy and content, this group is also hard to pigeonhole.

"No one formula fits all," warned Margaret Wylde of ProMatura of Oxford, Mass., market researcher and consultant to active adult builders and author of three books on the boomer market. She said what they want depends on a variety of factors, such as family size, marital status, income and age.

What they do seem to like, gleaned from several seminars dissecting the 55 and older market, was walking trails, fitness facilities, showy homes loaded with upgrades with kitchens well-equipped to cook gourmet dinners for a crowd.

The green wave is also sweeping through the housing industry, though there's still some educating to be done.

"Green is the new red, white and blue," observed Gayle Butler, editor-in-chief of Better Homes and Gardens magazine. "There's more concern about energy efficiency and reducing water. These are issues that are becoming mainstream interests and concerns."

"We are entering a period of change in consciousness and people want more information on these things and want to clarify their choices."

It's a difficult balance between green features and consumer want, said Gopal Ahluwalia, vice-president of research for the NAHB. "They want more glass (windows) and higher ceilings and they want energy efficiency, too."

But he said most are willing to spend only \$5,000 upfront on energy efficient features.

Green was the theme for this year's New American Home, one of two showcase homes in a historic Orlando neighbourhood. The project is a "real-world" laboratory demonstrating concepts, materials, designs and construction techniques that can be replicated in whole or in part in housing built any place and in any price range.

Its energy-efficient features include low-gain solar windows with four-foot overhangs, precast concrete walls, solar thermal hot water heating, Energy Star appliances, photovoltaic panels and low-voltage systems. The 4,707-square-foot contemporary house uses 73 per cent less energy than a comparably sized house built to conventional standards in a hot, humid climate.

The home, built on a 50-foot infill lot, also was inspired by another trend identified at the builder show - that homeowners are forsaking the suburbs and moving closer to downtown where they can walk to restaurants, parks and entertainment.

Toronto's Linda Mitchell, vice-president of sales and marketing for highrise for Monarch Corp., addressed the urban living trend during her seminar on Maximizing Small Spaces, which also featured Toronto interior designer Alex Chapman.

"People are getting fed up with commuting," said Mitchell. "The stress is too much. Urban living offers ease and affordability, as well there's environmental awareness, as you don't have to use your car."

"But the biggest and most important reason for this trend is the lifestyle option," she added. "People are enjoying living close to shops, restaurants, theatre."

Mitchell said while condos are a huge trend in Toronto, that's also true in the United States, where condominiums are one of the biggest selling housing products.

Mitchell said in 1997, there were 74 condo projects in the GTA; now there are 240.

There were about 2.5 million condo owners in the U.S. in 2005, according to the NAHB, up from 1.9 million in 1997. About half of multi-family building starts in 2005 (which also includes apartments and townhouses) were condominiums, expected to stabilize at 30 per cent annually.

While Mitchell said Toronto buyers are from "across the board" and represent young singles, married couples, families, move-up buyers and downsizers, in the U.S. young professional singles or couples buying their first home or mature buyers who want to have less maintenance are the key buyers.

*Caption:*

Linda Mitchell of Monarch Corp. says buyers from across the GTA are getting fed up with commuting. Steve Russell Toronto Star file photo In 1997, there were 74 ongoing condo projects in the Greater Toronto Area. Now there are 240, according to Monarch Corp.

Steve Russell Toronto Star file photo In 1997, there were 74 ongoing condo projects in the Greater Toronto Area. Now there are 240, according to Monarch Corp.

Copyright (c) 2007, Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. All rights reserved.

*Author: Tracy Hanes  
Section: New in Homes  
Page: M01  
Column:  
Dateline: ORLANDO, FLA.  
Copyright (c) 2007, Toronto Star Newspapers Limited. All rights reserved.*