

ABC CONSTRUCTION

Just like any business owner, **Bruce Stephens**, who along with partner **Brad Crawford** owns and operates **ABC Construction**, is proud of his product. Have a conversation with him, and it will be easy to detect his excitement about the homes he and Crawford are building.

Stephens' excitement is about much more than making money, though. The excitement is about making a positive impact on the community and its people.

ABC Construction specializes in building EarthCraft Houses, homes that are constructed to use less energy and provide a cleaner and healthier environment than standard homes. They are also built to reach Energy Star standards.

Among the features that lead to more efficiency, according to Stephens, are the difference in pipes used in Earthcraft Houses as compared to standard homes, as well as a variation on insulation. "We use hard pipes rather than the flexible pipes, which means less air escapes," Stephens said. "In order to reach Energy Star standards, the house can't have more than three percent leakage on a duct blaster test. When you have less air leakage, homes can use smaller heating and air units with less run time and less voltage. Those all help lead to a more efficient home."

On a recent tour of one of the Earthcraft Homes still under construction, Stephens showed how the homes are insulated with a sprayed-on foam and a material produced from ground-up newspaper. Several other air sealing methods are also used throughout the home. Following completion of the building process, a blower door test is administered by a Home Energy Rating System (HERS) rater to determine the level of air leakage.

"To be certified as an Energy Star home, it must be 50 percent more efficient than a standard home," Crawford said.

Before a new homeowner moves into the house, a Georgia Power



Brad Crawford (left) and Bruce Stephens stand on the front steps of one of ABC Construction's new homes aimed at saving energy and money while providing a cleaner and healthier environment.

representative will print out an estimate of the cost of the average monthly power bill.

Along with a more efficient living space with lower energy costs, Stephens said the EarthCraft House greatly reduces or eliminates hazardous materials such as mold and radon. He also mentioned that even with all the benefits, the cost to build an EarthCraft House is comparable to building a standard home.

ABC Construction is taking a different approach to selling its homes. It has started a "trade-up" program in which ABC will purchase the buyer's current home if that buyer purchases an EarthCraft Home.

"This way, if someone is looking to move into a new home, they can sell the house without it sitting on the market for 6-12 months," Stephens said. "They can move in 2-3 weeks without any hassle, or if they want us to build them a home, we can do that and they'll know they have a place to stay until the new home is finished."

ABC will then offer a lease-to-purchase option on the former house to someone who would like

to purchase a home but has had credit issues in the past. The new tenant would be required to go through a financial planning class created by noted Crown Financial Ministries co-founder Larry Burkett for a year. If the program is successfully completed, the tenant would have the option to purchase the house after leasing for a year.

"We've learned that most people aren't educated about how to handle money, and we make mistakes," Stephens said. "This allows us to help people clean up their credit and get into a home of their own."

Stephens knows it's a different approach, but he and Crawford are willing to step out on a limb. They know that everyone can benefit.

"One goal we have is to not be like a soccer game with little kids, where everybody is chasing around the same ball," Stephens said. "We know we are using a different ball, and we believe it's good for the community, good for the end user and good for us. If it is good for all these parties, we feel like we're going to be busy."

ABC Construction can also be reached at 706.252.5396. ■