

Cowles Co. Promotes Green Building

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RECYCLING EFFORTS: Bernard Cowles of The Cowles Co. is using his Cooper-Young construction site as a way to “reduce, reuse and recycle.” Cowles, who is a Certified Green Professional through the National Association of Home Builders, is hoping to bring more green homes to Memphis.

Bernard Cowles of The Cowles Co. is a firm believer in the environmental mantra of “reduce, reuse and recycle,” and evidence of this can be found at his construction project at Cooper-Young Place, a 33-home site he developed and is building at South Barksdale Street and Elzey Avenue.

There, Cowles created a “Green Zone,” replete with a sign that reads, “The Cowles Company is a Green company. The materials in this area are free for you to reuse. Please help us recycle.”

The area is filled with lumber and other scraps – such as a slightly damaged door – from the construction site that anyone in the neighborhood can take.

“It’s just out there for people to reuse,” Cowles said. “Who knows, someone might want to burn it or build a chicken coop out of it or whatever. Somebody will find a use for it, especially all the building lumber. They love all that stuff.”

It’s that attitude that led Cowles to become a Certified Green Professional through the National Association of Home Builders, which means he can build homes to certain green standards. Now, he is looking to promote national green building principles in the Memphis area.

“It’s important for me to learn all the aspects (of green building),” Cowles said, “so I can educate my customers on what is green and how to build a more sustainable house

without making it look like it's supposed to be in California, somewhere.”

Built for Memphis

As Cowles pointed out, a green home doesn't have to look crazy, with a geodesic dome with solar panels and windmills everywhere. He wants to build “just a typical house you would see in Memphis, but also with some sustainable products and more energy efficient ways that really don't cost that much more money, especially for the benefits they receive.”

Though some green building materials do cost more, such as tankless water heaters, the items can save homeowners 30 percent off their utility bills. Also, sustainable homes qualify for energy efficiency mortgages, where a customer who's buying the eco-friendly residence can qualify for more money or get a lower interest rate because of the projected savings in their monthly costs and the lower debt-to-equity ratio.

Cowles has seen buyers become better educated about green principles through the Internet, and they are becoming more eager to look for green features in a home, whether it's a programmable thermostat, energy-efficient windows or recycled building materials.

“A lot of people want to be more conscious and more aware,” Cowles said. “They're more inclined to look at your product a little bit longer, and maybe they'll choose your product over someone else's if they are doing their part to reduce carbon emissions and have a lighter footprint on Mother Nature.

“In the long run, it puts me at an advantage over other builders that aren't offering these products.”

Creating a standard

Helping Cowles sell his “green” homes and have a positive effect on the planet is another local company, Sowell & Co., that looks beyond the bottom line.

Jeanie Henson, a Realtor at Sowell & Co., said the company's mission aligns well with Cowles.

“Our colors are green, and our slogan is ‘Go Green With Sowell,’ so we're kind of a perfect fit with Bernard,” Henson said.

Sowell co-owner Linda Sowell said she and her employees have been learning about all things green in a home, from things as simple as compact fluorescent light bulbs to more complex features such as wood floors made from sustainable bamboo.

She said it helps to work with The Cowles Co., a business that is building green homes “from the ground up with conservation in mind.”

“People looking in Midtown and Memphis in general are very aware of the environment and wanting to take care of the environment and conserve energy,” Sowell said. “I think it’s a great fit for us.”

Cowles said the company will ramp up its green building next year with the 10-lot Christie Place in Cooper-Young, a development whose homes will be rated to National Association of Home

Builders and Energy Star standards. He said before long, builders won’t need to distinguish their homes as “green” or “sustainable.” Instead, that approach will be the standard.

“It’s really not going to be fad,” Cowles said. “It’s going to be the wave of the future.”