

Faganel builds tight, right



Faganel Builders has been building energy-efficient, green homes since 1991.

After building houses in Colorado, David Faganel knows conservative Midwestern buyers are not quite as eco-savvy as buyers in the West. But, we're getting there. And, Faganel's Batavia-based company, R.A. Faganel Builders, is ready.

"Especially with the high utility bills we've had, Midwestern buyers are more likely than before to want houses that are energy-efficient," says Faganel, the company president. "So we developed what we call the Millennium III house (standard), which has a HERS [Home Energy Rating System] rating of 62. That's

better than a typical Energy Star-rated house, which is 85. Off the grid is 0."

Faganel Builders guarantees a home buyer will pay less than \$100 a month to heat his house during the first two years. Its smallest model, the 3,000-square-foot Windsor, has a guarantee that the heating bill won't exceed \$49 a month.

The key is building a tight house, explains Faganel. Before he hands the house keys over to the buyer, the company conducts a blower-door test to locate air leaks, an infrared camera test that shows "hot spots" where heat escapes through insulation gaps and a duct-blast test that finds air holes in the ductwork. Then, the Faganel crew fixes the holes and gaps before the house closes.

Because Faganel's standards are high, his subcontractors learn to do it right the first time, or they will have to go back and fix it before closing, says Faganel. "That weeds out the subs who start out by saying, 'But, I've been doing it this way for 50 years,' " says Faganel.

Faganel Builders' target market is the move-up buyer who wants a house in the \$300,000 to \$600,000 range. Its signature house, says Faganel, has a traditional, partial-brick exterior and an open interior. Its current developments are Coventry Hills in Batavia, Tall Oaks in Elgin, Tanner Trails in North Aurora and Autumn Gate in Oswego. Buyers choose from a set of floor plans, then request alterations to fit their lifestyles.

Faganel also builds townhouses. Its newest multifamily development is River Woods in North Aurora. These range from 1,433 to 2,140 square feet and are priced from \$269,000 to \$369,900. They meet the same Millennium III standard as Faganel Builders' single-family houses do.

Faganel Builders was founded in Wheaton in 1964 by David's father, Robert, who is now retired. After collecting a degree in construction management, then building houses in Colorado for nine years, David joined his father in 1989. By then, the company had moved west to the Fox Valley and its houses had grown from Robert's original split-levels.

"Now, we have some buyers who are in their third Faganel houses," he says.

Over the years he has seen buyers' wish lists evolve. Now, his buyers want 9-foot ceilings, second staircases, three-car garages, home offices, roughed-in bathrooms in basements so they can finish them later, walk-in closets, extra-large kitchens with islands and master bedroom suites that serve as adult getaways. Amenities that were hot a few years ago but have since fallen off his buyers' radar screens include two-story family rooms, multiple fireplaces and living rooms. The formal dining room is a wild card, says Faganel; some buyers ditch it, while others keep it as a status symbol, even if they don't plan to use it.

Although it isn't as flashy as features such as granite countertops, Faganel says buyers appreciate his houses' healthy indoor air quality. To achieve this, the company uses whole-house air exchangers, anti-bacteria filtration systems and humidifiers with anti-microbial water pads.

Other than a childhood dream of running a sports team, Faganel says he was hard-wired to become a home builder.

"One of my earliest memories was handing out brochures to buyers at Dad's models," he recalls. "When a house sold, Dad told me I sold it, and I believed him!"

Now, says Faganel, he realizes surviving in this business means more than being a good salesman. It means "being imaginative, forward-thinking and believing in continuing ed."

For motivation, Faganel reads presidential biographies. From Doris Kearns Goodwin's "Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln," he says he learned "how Lincoln had to keep his eye on the big picture, despite opposition and challenges. That applies to building, too. There will always be changes in building codes, land costs and impact fees. But we'll always need housing.

"My pet peeve is people who are perfectly happy with the status quo. There's no perfect house. But our goal is to keep moving in that direction."