"The Greenest Developer in the Country," is Endorsed by Department of Energy Zero Energy Homes Manager


Aiken, S.C. (PRWEB) May 5, 2010 -- "Ron Monahan may be the Greenest developer in the country," says Lew Pratsch, Zero Energy Homes Project Manager of the Department of Energy's Building Technologies Program, after a recent visit to The Ridge at Chukker Creek in Aiken, S.C.

"As Ron likes to say, what he and his team are doing at The Ridge at Chukker Creek and at SpringLeaf in Boulder, Co., are not tomorrow's zero energy homes, they are building them today, at reasonable prices," said Pratsch after touring The Ridge.

Monahan's renowned Green building architect from Boulder, George Watt, said the homes to be built have construction price targets for houses in the 2,000 square foot range of $300,000 to 325,000. "That is our design goal for a net zero house," Watt says.

Monahan's Green homebuilding vision was already out in front of most of the rest of the country and the world with the combination of hydrogen fuel cells and photovoltaic solar panels to provide energy to homeowners at The Ridge at Chukker Creek, but now he is going one better.

Monahan, Watt and a team of experts are adding a "solar garden," on the ground - not on the rooftops - that will provide the energy needed to run the approximately 260 homes to be built at The Ridge. Some of the array will be on The Ridge property and the others will be nearby in a utility-scale solar array being built just outside this beautiful, small Southern city. Homeowners will buy into the Ridge Solar Energy Association and receive a monthly check from the sale of the electricity to the local electric cooperative - calculated to be close to their energy bill.

The Ridge at Chukker Creek is a 114-acre upscale development in Aiken, a place of many charms and scientific advantages. The development includes a 61-acre conservation easement on the loveliest part of the property, including a heavily hardwood-covered hillside with a stream and horse trails, overlooking a beautiful 12-acre lake. Above the hill are large plots, most of which will become equestrian properties. Below the hill are smaller lots, almost all of which face expanses of green space. They will be served by a state of the art equestrian facility, miles of walking and riding trails and both a swimming pool and a greenhouse - both heated with energy supplied by the nearby solar array and hydrogen fuel cells.

Originally, Monahan had intended to put solar panels on roughly 200 of the 260 homes in the development. However, doing so requires the cutting of many specimen trees to clear the way for sunshine to reach the panels on the roofs. Those lost trees would otherwise shade and cool the homes in the summer and protect them against wind in the winter.
Monahan said he woke up in the middle of the night with a dramatic solution.

He will put hundreds of panels on pedestals a few feet off the ground, sending the electricity produced from the sun directly to the Aiken Electric Cooperative. There will be a huge savings in construction and maintenance and make it possible to buy panels in much larger batches, thus further reducing the cost.

The homeowners who wish to participate will then become part of the Ridge Solar Energy Association, just like any other homeowners association, except they will be owners of their own little on-site power company. Each month the utility will send a check to the association, which will send checks to the homeowners based on the number of kilowatts supplied by the panels they purchase. It is expected that over the course of a year the checks to the homeowners will offset the power bills for the highly energy efficient houses, especially for those who add the never-before commercially available advantage of using the production of hydrogen - nearly for free - to supplement the solar power to their homes.

Monahan is building a home for himself on the property and he plans to drive his hydrogen powered vehicle into his hydrogen house to fuel up - for free - in his own garage. Other homebuyers have already committed to follow suit. Optimally, says Monahan, "not only will you be producing the energy to operate your home, but the fuel to power your automobile as well, and all of it will be completely green, with a zero carbon footprint, and at very little expense once operational."

Monahan has assembled a team of experts to design this unprecedented level of energy efficiency in an entire neighborhood. Architect Watt is a key member of the team, as is Scott Greenway, Ph.D., president of Greenway Energy. Dr. Greenway is the chief scientist for the [http://www.archydrogen.com/] Center for Hydrogen Research in Aiken County, S.C., adjacent to the Savannah River Site and its Savannah River National Laboratory, a world-leader in hydrogen research for over 50 years. The center is the vision of Fred Humes, director of the Aiken-Edgefield Economic Development Partnership. The Ridge is within the city limits of Aiken, S.C., a noted equestrian training center and the winner of multiple awards as a highly regarded place to live, work and retire.

"This is not the energy of the future," Monahan said, about how many people speak about one day using hydrogen as an economically viable solar energy. "This is the energy of now. We are building these systems this year and anyone who wants to live this carbon free lifestyle can find it at the Ridge at Chukker Creek."

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An ABC News affiliate last February bestowed the same unofficial title as America's Greenest developer upon Monahan after a demonstration of how the technology works.

At that time, Monahan made a pledge to homebuyers. "If you buy one of our homes we will save you money, and lots of it," he declared. "Over a year's time, your house should pay its own energy bill."

Net Zero means that the house produces its own electricity and returns as much or more of it to the electric grid than it needs from the grid in times of low energy production. The homeowner gets a credit for the electricity the house sends back and in times when the house needs energy, it simply draws it back from the grid. The stated goal is to break even - hence, Net Zero.

However, Monahan's first house in Boulder is selling more energy to the grid than it is using. The model home is monitored on the Web by eGauge, which allows anyone to observe its energy production and use at any given
"This house is different," says Monahan of the recently completed home now on display at the SpringLeaf development in Boulder. "You've never been in a house like this in your life because there hasn't been one. You will get meager energy bills some months, but those should be offset by credits you earn from selling power to your utility, as long as you live in the house and follow the energy consumption usage for what it was designed."

When tested, the Boulder House exceeded the Net Zero LEED Platinum (+), which is the highest standard in home energy construction as rated by the U.S. Green Building Council. "We are setting the new standard with this house!" said Monahan.

Builder magazine recently featured Monahan and his two remarkable projects. Watt's designs go far beyond the power sources to try to reach the Net Zero goal. Spray foam insulation, EnergyStar sealing of every possible heat loss leak, smart framing, energy efficient appliances and many more go energy efficient practices go into his overall concept of building self-sufficient houses.

"The concept of renewable energy in residential homes is no longer a dream for the future," said Monahan. "It is happening now and we have the proof to show the rest of the nation in Boulder, Colorado, and now underway in Aiken, South Carolina."

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