

Here's an Innovative Approach to the Off-Site (aka Modular) Construction Industry

Every day I receive email newsletters about real estate, and one of my favorites is "Construct Utopia," published by *Pro Builder* magazine. This week is not the first time I have written a column based on or inspired by an article in that newsletter.

A common subject these days is modular or off-site construction. The latest Construct Utopia newsletter has an article about Cuby Technologies, a startup which devised a solution for customizable mass produced prefab homes — mobile micro factories. Instead of constructing big factories that ship modules for new homes, Cuby produces micro factories that are set up near the construction site, such as in a field or on a rented parking lot.

Modular construction is typically off site, so bringing the factory to or near the worksite is an interesting twist — perhaps call it "on-site (or close-by) off-site construction." The factory could also serve other build sites, functioning as a traditional off-site modular factory but one that is much closer.

REAL ESTATE TODAY



By JIM SMITH Realtor®

The micro-factory is shipped in about 10 containers, and it is set up inside a tent that covers 30,000 to 40,000 square feet of interior space for creating the modules to be assembled on a nearby construction site.

The idea is to eliminate one of the major costs of modular construction, which is shipping the modules great distances to the work site.

I've been a fan of the idea of modular construction ever since I purchased what I thought was a stick-built home in the Mesa Meadows subdivision in Golden. I bought the home in 1997. After moving in, a neighbor told me he had watched my home go up in one day, delivered from Ft. Morgan on flatbed trailers for installation on a prepared foundation. The finishing work was then performed, if I recall correctly, by Pat Foss, a local builder.

The advantages of building the home in a factory, I was told at the time, was better quality control, including better insulation. The exterior walls were all built with 2x6



instead of 2x4 studs, to better withstand flatbed transportation from Ft. Morgan.

Above is an artist's rendering of one of Cuby's micro factories. The neighbors of construction sites would probably appreciate having the construction of a new building or subdivision taking place largely indoors, even if it is just a tent, reducing the noise and dust of on-site construction.

Construction in a tent has other advantages, including protection from the elements, whether it be rain or snow or simply cold weather. Productivity would be greatly enhanced. Workers would appreciate working a predictable number of days and hours as well as being warm during the winter months. Making working conditions better could also address one of the biggest problems facing the home construction industry: attracting and hiring enough workers.

By completing the major structural panels indoors, the subsequent

on-site finishing work can be made more attractive thanks to being able to "weather in" the building quickly. This, too, would improve working conditions and enhance recruitment.

"Inside the dome," according to the company, "machines and conveyor belts produce and prep all the elements of the home — windows, wall panels, plumbing pipes, dry-wall, HVAC systems, and so on — then package them into kits."

The enclosed environment also contributes to less waste and better waste management and recycling.

Although Cuby promotes its micro factories for home building, it's not a home builder. It sells the micro factories for \$10-15 million. Their customers are typically developers, builders, general contractors and private equity groups, whose customers might then be midsize home builders.

Cuby claims that it can lower the cost of new construction from \$150 per square foot to \$100/square foot.

The company began as a startup in Belarus. Co-founder Aleksandr Gampel says the first micro factory will be assembled in Detroit shortly. Within the next decade he expects to produce 275 micro factories that will build 200,000 homes and create 300,000 jobs, removing approximately 750,000 tons of waste from the construction process.

Colorado Environmental Film Festival Is Next Week!

Every February, Golden Real Estate is proud to co-sponsor the Colorado Environmental Film Festival (CEFF). It's the only film festival of its kind, and you can attend in person Feb. 22-25, or you can buy a virtual ticket (which I'll do this year, since I'm on a cruise) that allows you to stream most of the films for 7 days, starting Monday, Feb. 26th.

This year's festival features 66 inspiring world-class environmental films, including screenings of feature-length and short films from foreign, Colorado and young filmmakers.

Fifteen of the films are world premieres. Another 25 have never been seen in Colorado. From films like "Rhino Man" which tells the heroic story of South African rangers who risk their lives to protect rhinos from poachers, to informational shorts like "Fight Food Waste," you're bound to find several that will inform and inspire you.

I'm looking forward to viewing "Silent Skies — The First Electric Plane Flyover" and "Single Use Planet," a film about plastic bags and other single-use products, among others.

Previously, the festival has been hosted by the American Mountaineering Center at 10th Street and Washington Avenue in downtown Golden. This year it moves to the Green Center, a bigger venue on the campus of the Colorado School of Mines, a few



blocks to the southwest. The Green Center offers more auditoriums, including the biggest one in Jeffco, allowing CEFF to showcase more of the world's best environmental films.

For a list of all 66 films go to <https://ceff2024.eventive.org/films?mode=list>.

The films are divided into nine "collections" of 4 to 5 films each. Collections cost \$12 each to view, or you can buy an All-Access Pass for \$90, which includes the Online Encore Pass, which costs \$60 by itself. (That's the 7-day online ticket I mentioned above.) Tickets are not sold for individual films.

There's an "Eco Expo" with table displays throughout the festival, featuring environmental non-profits, government agencies, and vendors involved in all aspects of environmental sustainability. We may have a booth there ourselves, as we have in prior years.

Consistent with CEFF's mission to "inspire, educate and motivate," it provides 4th to 12th grade teachers with free in-classroom virtual access to festival films from March 1st through May 31st.

This & That: Smaller Topics Not Worth Full Articles

Renewable Energy Is Being Banned in More and More U.S. Counties

That is the gist of a February 4th article on USA Today's website. Here is an excerpt:

"In the past decade, about 180 counties got their first commercial wind-power projects. But in the same period, more than twice as many blocked wind development. And while solar power has found more broad acceptance, 2023 was the first year to see almost as many individual counties block new solar projects as the ones adding their first projects." Find a link to the full USA Today article at <http://RealEstateToday.Sub-stack.com>.

Beware of Scammers Pretending to Be Alerting You to a Scam

Fox 31 reported recently on a Golden couple scammed out of more than \$137,000. It began with a phone call purporting to be from the Chase fraud department. The lesson here is to question every phone call, text or email you receive. If that Golden resident had said, "Thank you," then hung up and called Chase's customer service number to see if there was a fraud alert on his account, he would have avoided losing \$137,000 to a scammer.

I have posted a link to that story on my Substack blog (same link at left).

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"Concentrate on giving, and the getting will take care of itself." —Anonymous