

4 Colorado Home Builders Honored by Dept. of Energy for Construction Innovation

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) presented its 2017 Housing Innovation Awards to 24 of the nation's leading builders recently at the Energy and Environmental Building Alliance's **High Performance Home Summit** in Atlanta. Four Colorado builders were among the national honorees, one of them for homes being built in the Denver metro area.

Thrive Home Builders (Denver) was the Grand Winner in the Production Home category. The Custom Home category had no Colorado honorees. **Thrive Home Builders (Lone Tree)** was the Grand Winner in the Multi-Family category. **Revive Properties (Fort Collins)** was also honored in the Production and Multi-Family categories, and **Mantell-Hecathorn Builders (Durango)** was honored for Innovation in Custom Homes (Buyers), but not as the Grand Winner in that category.

These innovation awards are part of DOE's "Zero Energy Ready Homes" program. According to Sam Rashkin, chief architect at DOE's Building Technologies Office, "Zero Energy Ready Homes are designed to provide a whole new level of home owner experience, including **ultra-low utility bills, ensured comfort, comprehensive water protection, whole-house fresh air delivery, high-capture filtration, contaminant control, and enhanced durability.**"

"These winners are leading a national movement to Zero Energy Ready Homes, providing better places for Americans to live, stronger communities, and a more economically and environmentally resilient nation," said Rashkin.

The judges also selected homes for honorable mention in each category. Winners and honorable mention recipients will be featured on the DOE **Tour of Zero**, a virtual tour of Zero Energy Ready Homes across the country. A list of previous years' winners (going back to 2013) can be seen online at <https://energy.gov/eere/buildings/doe-tour-zero>. **Thrive Home Builders** won this award in 2013, 2014, 2015 under the name **New Town Builders** and in two categories last year, as they did this year, under their new name.

From attending builder booths at various Realtor events, I have observed that builders active in the Denver market are highly competitive regarding the energy efficiency of their new homes. Energy efficiency

is measured by the builders' average **HERS** scores. **HERS** stands for **Home Energy Rating System**, where a score of 100 equals the energy efficiency of a home built to current code. Thus, a HERS score of 60 would signify that the home uses 40% less energy than one built only to code. The lower the HERS score, the more energy efficient a home is. Almost all builders active in the Denver market boast average HERS ratings of 70 or lower. Thrive Home Builders is building homes with HERS ratings under 10.

According to Susan Elovitz from Thrive, "All Thrive homes go beyond the Zero Energy Ready Homes program to also include Thrive's premium performance 9½" walls filled with energy saving insulation, PV solar, LED Lighting, tankless water heaters and more. Indoor airPLUS certification is also standard, which means they meet rigorous EPA guidelines for improved indoor air quality, but again, it's only a starting point for Thrive. Innovations in clean indoor air include active radon systems, advanced air filtration, continuous fresh air ventilation, corn-based carpeting and drywall that absorbs and breaks down formaldehyde to ensure that indoor air pollutants are reduced in the air you breathe."

That's impressive. Our agents were also impressed by Meritage Homes' new subdivision at **Richards Farm**, where we got a pre-construction tour and could see that builder's approach toward insulation.

Meritage showed us how they use sprayed foam

insulation instead of fiberglass insulation in their walls. Closed cell foam is a far better insulator than batts made of fiberglass. Meritage is the only builder I know that conditions their attic, meaning that they insulate the **ceiling** of the attic — that is, the underside of the roof — instead of the **floor** of the attic. Other builders typically blow in cellulose insulation that rests on the floor of the attic. The attic above the insulation is then ventilated with outside air. If there are heating ducts in an unconditioned attic, the warm air in those ducts could lose a lot of their heat, but if the attic is conditioned space, that doesn't happen. If you have gone into your **floor**-insulated attic during the summer months you know how exceptionally hot it can get. By comparison, temperatures in an attic with an insulated **ceiling** are greatly reduced.

Reflections on Home Construction From Visiting Italy

Rita and I just returned from 3 weeks vacationing in Italy, and of course I couldn't help but to look at homes and how they are built. I came away with the following observations:

They don't build wood frame homes in Italy (or elsewhere in Europe that I know of). The concept of building walls with 2x4 wood studs and covering them with half-inch drywall, as best I could tell, would probably seem a bit strange to an Italian (or perhaps any European). They build homes to last, using concrete or tile blocks, which are then covered by stucco. As for roofs, I suspect an Italian home builder would scoff at the idea of composition shingle roofs with 30 to 50 year lifetimes, easily destroyed by a hail storm. In Italy, virtually every roof is tile, and many of them look as if they are hundreds of years old. I imagine they'd find it curious that we replace roofs that don't leak but have merely lost some of their surface granules after a storm.

Perhaps there are readers who are familiar with European construction methods who could provide me with additional information that I can then share in a future column, because I find the concept of building more durable homes highly attractive.

The way we build homes in America strikes me as "penny wise and pound foolish," but I don't consider myself an expert on the subject and would like to know more. Call or write me so I can learn more and share more!

REAL ESTATE TODAY



By **JIM SMITH, Realtor®**



One of Thrive Home Builders' award-winning homes being built in the metro Denver area.

Another new concept you'll hear more about -- 'Vehicle to Grid'

In discussing solar electricity with battery storage last week as an alternative to being "on-grid," I neglected to mention something called **V2G**— Vehicle to Grid. The idea is that after you have charged your electric car from your home, you could draw upon the vehicle's stored energy during a power failure. Another reason to own an EV!



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Here Are Some Things to Consider When Hiring Your Listing Agent

By JIM SMITH, Realtor®

Notice that I used the verb “to *hire*.” This is a job, and the job is to handle one of the largest financial transactions in your life, so first of all you need to establish qualifications and criteria before even interviewing candidates for this job.

Becoming a licensed real estate agent is probably easier than it should be, considering how important our job is. Appraisers, by contrast, have to study more, pass harder tests, and even apprentice before they can get their licenses. For real estate, you need only take 168 hours of licensing class (which you can do online) and pass a 3-hour state exam, plus survive a criminal background check from the Colorado Bureau of Investigation. This is why we have so many part-timers in this business, and why the average real estate licensee earns less than \$50,000 per year. You’d be surprised at how many licensees have zero or one transaction per year. Those agents are living

off another income or a supportive spouse, and their small number of completed transactions means they have limited experience to serve you.

So, qualification number one for the job of listing your home should be the number of completed transactions the licensee has had within the past few years. You can get this information on Denver’s MLS, www.REcolorado.com. I’ve created a shortcut that goes directly to the agent look-up page: www.FindDenverRealtors.com. (Keep nicknames in mind when entering your candidate’s name. I’m Jim, not James, but some Jim’s may be under James, etc.) When you find the agent, click on “View My Listings” where you’ll see a number for “Properties I’m Selling” and “Properties I’ve Sold.” This is not to say that a less experienced agent working under good supervision (like my broker associates) wouldn’t be a good candidate, but experience does count, so find out how experienced he or she is. With proper supervision, a newer, hungrier agent might do a great job and be more attentive.

While you’re there, take a look at how the agent is presenting his/her listings. Are the all-important photographs high quality, or do the rooms appear dark and are the windows a white blur? Study the details of each listing. Does the agent describe each room in detail, including dimensions, or do they just have bare-bones public remarks? Click on the “virtual tour” (if you see a link for it above the main picture). Is it just a

slideshow of the same pictures but with music, or is it a narrated video walk-through of the property?

Remember, the best predictor of how your house will be portrayed is how this agent has presented his or her prior listings.

Any employer (which is your role in this situation) would Google the candidate’s name and see what comes up. Look at their Facebook page and other social media to see if they’re serious and successful and have good reviews.

Appraisers are required to have “geographic competence” when accepting assignments, but not so with real estate agents. You are perfectly free to hire an agent who hasn’t had a listing within 20 miles of your home and doesn’t know your market. But should you? All too often I see instances where a seller fell in love with a home far from their current home and hired the agent for that home to list their current home. **Do the opposite.** Hire the best qualified Realtor to list your current home and let that agent represent you in the purchase of your replacement home — and have that agent **discount your listing commission** because of what they will earn on your purchase. That’s what I do.

If you’re like most people, you have a friend or relative with a real estate license, or a friend who recommends their friend or relative. Subject that candidate to the same qualifications and criteria as any other candidate. This job is just too important. Hire wisely.



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