

Energy-efficient home builder thrives in North Port

By **STEVE SMITH**
STAFF WRITER

NORTH PORT — If you're looking for an energy-efficient home built to the latest green standards and priced from the \$150s, builder Dennis Kotaska is your man.

Kotaska's company — American Homes LLC at 2314 W. Price Blvd. — launched in North Port in 2003, but he is part of a home-building family that goes back three generations.

"My grandfather was a builder in the '30s and '40s," he said. "My dad and mother were builders from the '50s to the '90s, and I've been on my own since I got out of the service in 1970, (building) in the Chicago area, in Fort Myers and Sarasota."

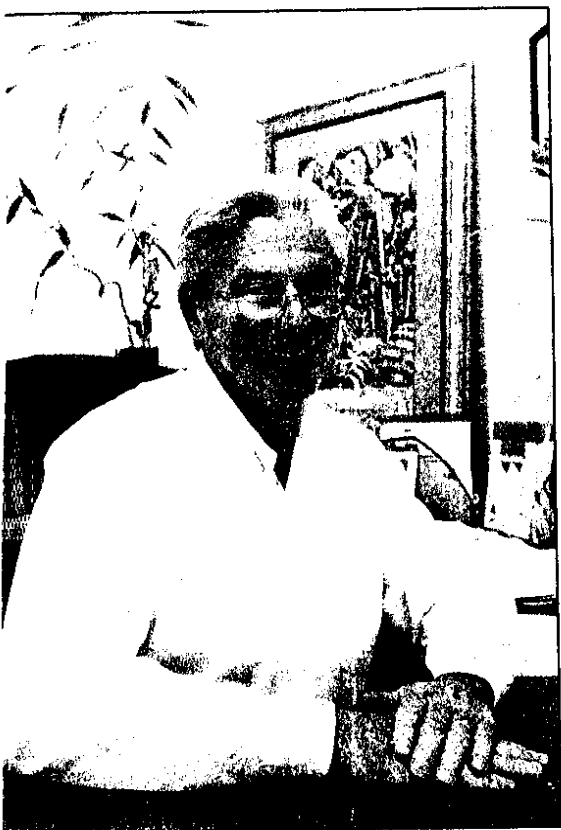
Kotaska estimated he has had something to do with the construction of around 10,000 homes in his 38-year career. Since '03, he has built in North Port, Port Charlotte, Rotonda and South Gulf Cove, completing about 70 homes over the last four years, he said.

"It's something you can't get out of your

blood," he laughed. "Being involved in all those homes over all those years, we do the little things that make our homes rock solid in their construction."

Little things such as three-quarter-inch, tongue-in-groove floors, he said, adding the big things are more ambitious and include:

- Soy-based, blown foam insulation — made from soybean oil, a domestic, renewable resource, replaces foreign made petroleum ingredients.
 - Low "volatile organic compounds" paint — which lessens toxin concentrations in landfills, groundwater and the ozone.
 - Graywater system — comprised of dish, shower, sink and laundry water for plant irrigation, utilizes 50 to 80 percent of wastewater, which reduces fresh water consumption.
 - Sealed roof — eliminates dust and mold while reducing pressure differentials in high winds.
 - Energy-efficient windows and doors — reduce heat loss in winter and heat gain in summer.
 - Energy-efficient air conditioning — uses an environmentally friendly refrigerant.
 - Solar panel — assisting the water heater, it reduces costs 50 to 90 percent.
 - Poured concrete walls — this method provides twice as much protection against fire as hollow-core concrete block, resists winds exceeding 160 mph, repels termites and will not burn.
 - Impact-resistant windows and doors — deters flying objects in a storm and hinders intruders, thieves and vandals.
 - Roof trusses — built to withstand 160 mph winds and improve overall rigidity.
- Kotaska maintained these earth-friendly add-ons offer a homeowner more than just a sense of pride.
- "A big, big factor of all this is, not only do (homeowners) have less utility bills, lower insurance costs, a safer home and a (smaller) carbon footprint to the



SUN PHOTO BY KHARLI ROSE,
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American Homes CEO Dennis Kotaska is building energy-efficient and storm-resistant homes in Southwest Florida.



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMERICAN HOMES

One of American Homes' energy-efficient, "green" homes.

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environment," he said, "They (also) get federal and state rebates."

Kotaska added he works with the Florida Green Building Coalition and a green consultant, who performs calculations on each completed new home for eco-friendly rebates. Homeowners receive a certification within two to four weeks from closing.

"An average home is going to receive between \$3,000 to \$7,000 in federal and state credits and rebates," he said. "The difference between a standard and eco-smart home is approximately 10 percent more (to build it). But your monthly savings (with credits and rebates) is

actually less. You're getting more home for less."

Kotaska indicated he is currently poised to build homes on seven lots in North Port, all priced from \$159,000 (for 1,504 square feet), up to \$448,900 (for 4,375 square feet).

All he needs is buyers.

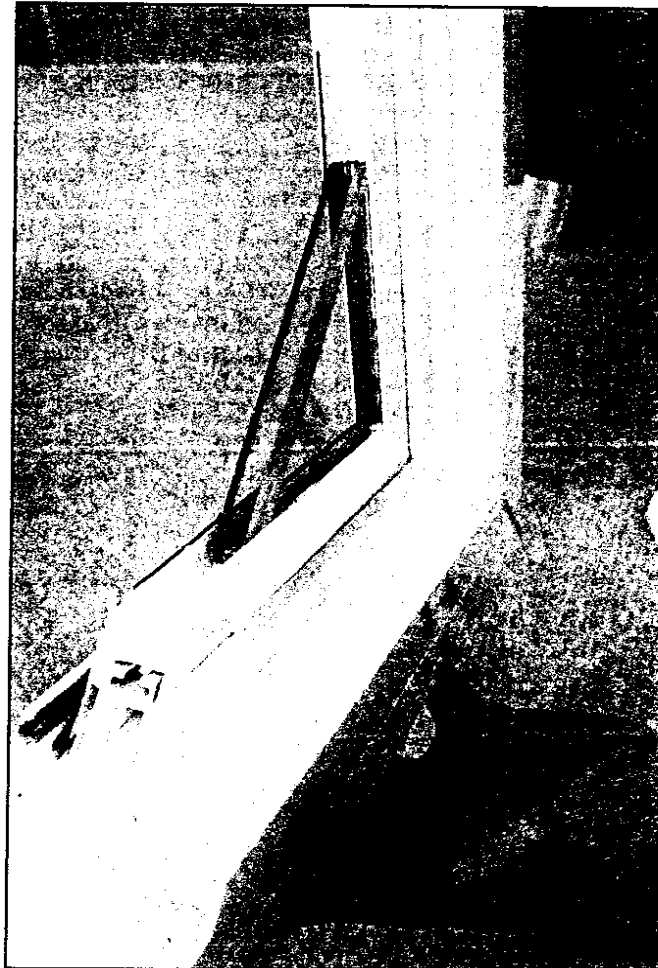
"I build one (home) at a time," he said. "And I have about 10 plans to choose from, all of which can be customized."

Kotaska concluded his homes go beyond energy efficiency at a reasonable cost — they assure their owners' safety.

"And how do you put a price tag on safety?" he said.

For more information on American Homes, call 941-429-7772.

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SUN PHOTOS BY KHARLI ROSE, kröse@sun-herald.com

Thermal-insulated high-impact windows were designed to reduce heat loss in winter and heat gain in summer.



Poured concrete walls were designed to sustain 160 mph winds.