

MintoBlue brings green homes to Cooper City

BY ANGIE FRANCALANCA

Minto Communities is betting that consumers are ready to embrace entirely green homes. The Canada-based homebuilder is rolling out the first community in South Florida that will meet certification standards of five different green building programs.

Known as the MintoBlue program, Minto's courtyard homes at Cascada will be built to meet standards set by Energy Star, FPL BuildSmart, the Florida Green Building Coalition, the National Association of Homebuilders' National Green Building Program and the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program.



Traxinger

"Minto Communities in Florida is proud to have created a new standard for energy efficiency, health and sustainability in its new homes. It is our hope that MintoBlue will lead the home building industry by providing our customers with unmatched achievements in design, quality and livability," Executive VP Jim Traxinger said. "Our studies already show how important the savings will be to Minto customers who have these features in their homes."

Just as important, Minto executives say, is that the Cooper City courtyard homes will be competitively priced.

"We've been looking for where we could make the dream become a reality, and the first place it could become a reality was Cascada," said Glen Trotta, VP of marketing.

Parent company Minto Group has been a leader in the green movement, having built Canada's first LEED-certified multifamily developments and platinum LEED-certified single-family production homes, according to the company's marketing data.

"This is the first developer that is actively looking to build LEED-quality residences that I'm aware of," said Jack McCabe of Deerfield beach-based McCabe Research and Consult-



Minto Communities' Cascada courtyard homes in Cooper City will be built to meet the standards of several green building programs.

ing. "The problem always has been in the past that these energy-efficient building materials were in limited quantities, and they were pricey. That's changing."

Still, the greatest difficulty in bringing together the MintoBlue program was "working with suppliers," Trotta said.

Even finding subcontractors experienced in sustainability has been a challenge, said Alan Gremillion, purchasing agent for Minto's East Coast projects.

"The biggest challenge is incorporating all the green products we learned about at a price that's still affordable to the homeowner," he said.

Priced from the low \$200,000s, Cascada will offer 48 courtyard homes within the 500-acre Monterra community, ranging from 1,400 to 1,700 square feet. Models will open June 19. It's one of several once-distressed projects that Minto picked up during the real estate market's tumble.

Minto has been adept at reading the market to "buy low and sell high," McCabe said.

"They sold most of their assets at the height of the market and got top-dollar prices," he said. "Also, because most of their assets are in Canada, they were less affected by the Ameri-

can market than some of the others."

Picking up distressed projects at "I'm sure spectacularly reduced prices" will help Minto deliver projects at lower price points than others, he noted.

DESIGNED WITH CERTIFICATIONS IN MIND

The Cascada community was designed with the certifications in mind, including drip irrigation, which is drawn only from the community lakes, and overhangs in the buildings' designs to help block sunlight from the windows.

The project also will have double-paned, Argon-insulated windows, sliders and glass doors, a feature more commonly found in areas concerned about heat loss, rather than heat blocking.

"The stuff has been in the industry for a while, but people in South Florida haven't capitalized on it, Gremillion said. "Now, we're capitalizing on it."

Cascada is the first of what Minto executives expect to be many South Florida projects built to national green building standards, including some of the new West Coast projects coming online this summer.

In the last seven months, Minto has an-

nounced acquisition of four projects in the Tampa Bay area, including the huge Perico Island project started by the St. Joe Co. It's approved for 684 units in 12 condominium buildings. On May 15, it opens models at Hazeltine in Country Club East, a Lake Wood Ranch project, and models already are standing at Grand Hampton in Tampa. It also picked up 40 parcels in the Fish-Hawk Ranch community in Lithia, east of Tampa. Look for another announcement soon, Trotta said.

"As we find properties that meet our customer base, we'll grow on the east coast and the west coast - and possibly even in the Orlando area," he said.

MintoBlue will be a part of it "wherever and whenever we can."

Look for other developers to be watching, McCabe said.

"The question will be, when so many properties are selling at below-construction costs, can a builder come in with more construction costs and compete," he asked. "Are there enough energy-conscious people out there willing to pay a little more? Minto is betting that they are. I'm sure there's going to be many other builders keeping an eye on their sales."