

Urban Land Institute Meets



Modern

by **George Allen, CPM, MHM**



Housing

“Urbannovation 2.0,” showcasing the ability of Champion Enterprises’ innovative modular housing division, Genesis Homes, to meet urban construction challenges, was “the hit” of the Urban Land Institute’s (ULI) fall meeting in Las Vegas, Nev., according to ULI President Rick Rosan.

To demonstrate to the ULI attendees a modern alternative to the traditional urban construction and development process, Genesis by Champion constructed a 1,914-sq. ft., two-story modular home in its exhibit space within two days before the meeting. Approximately 3,000 meeting attendees toured the modular home during the three-day meeting (Oct. 23-26) and received information detailing how Genesis’ innovative modular building process can meet urban planners’ and developers’ needs for fast, high quality, sustainable, risk-reducing construction.

“The Champion home was a terrific attraction at the fall meeting’s Urban Land Expo, demonstrating in a very visible way the innovative building techniques now available to urban planners and developers to quickly build sustainable communities around the world,” stated ULI’s David Howard, executive vice president of membership and development.

For factory-built housing aficionados and their land-developer counterparts from around the world, this three-day, center-stage presence of a beautiful, high-quality, two-story modular home was a veritable watershed event. It provided, on one hand, a superb opportunity to demonstrate factory-built housing’s versatility and utility of design; and on the other hand, an eminently affordable, highly desirable contemporary shelter alternative for raw land development and urban in-fill applications!

The House

Genesis Homes, a member of the Champion family of builders, built the home offsite and then assembled the two-story modular home within one of the Venetian Hotel’s ballrooms in only two days before the start of ULI’s meeting! The home was attractively decorated inside and out, tastefully furnished, and completely accessorized—all but ready to move into. The three-bedroom, two-bath home was designed for placement on a narrow urban lot, also could be adapted to conform to local architecture and could be made available as a duplex.

Champion Enterprises, Inc. is the largest residential modular manufacturer in the U.S., and largest commercial modular builder in the United Kingdom, shipping from 26 factories in the U.S., two in Canada, and four in the United Kingdom.

For those of us attendees from within the factory-built housing family, it was near exhilarating to hear the oft-repeated “Oohs & Aahs” of veteran land developers and building professionals as they toured the show home. For many ULI members, it was their first time seeing a quality-built, fully accessorized modular home. One memorable remark overheard during the tour might have potential for influencing the very future of factory-built housing terminology! A veteran ULI developer was heard to say, “Modular housing? Not at all; this is truly modern housing!”

The Hubbub

How often does one enjoy a firsthand opportunity to see history being made? Infrequently! This “modern housing” display was residential land development and home-building history in the making! And the story doesn’t end there....

During the meeting, over 250 premier developers attended a special presentation given by Bill Griffiths, Champion’s chair-



Champion's ULI display house

man, president and CEO, and Kevin Flaherty, vice president of sales and marketing for Genesis Homes. Griffiths presented a recent example of how Champion's Caledonian Building Systems in the United Kingdom was able to construct a five-building, multi-story modular high-rise university project in a densely populated London neighborhood in less than 20 months. The company's use of steel modular technology and concrete also minimized traffic disruptions, while reducing construction dust and noise.

At one point, Griffiths shared the three-part Champion Solution to modular building success:

1. Maintain flexibility and quality of traditional modular manufacturing, but add value through focus on modern manufacturing methods such as lean manufacturing, Kaizan events, statistical process controls, and best practice sharing.
2. Maintain and grow the firm's national manufacturing platform to ensure increased production capacity.
3. Seek out and effect large building projects due to firm's capabilities and financial strength

Flaherty presented Champion's experiences with modular solutions for military and urban in-fill projects. Champion's Genesis modular homes

were currently used in Fort Lewis, Wash. at the first military privatization project in the country. Flaherty noted that by partnering with Genesis Homes and converting to the modular, the project team was able to control construction and financing costs due to the much shorter construction period. Additionally, the reduced delivery and smaller building team requirements of modular construction met the strict security and access protocols at Fort Lewis. Flaherty also reviewed a 38-home revitalization project surrounding a public elementary school in Detroit, Mich., with the project being completed quickly as the modular homes were delivered and installed at a rate of one home per day. The rapid completion rate provided tight security, while the offsite construction limited neighborhood impact.

As the moderator brought the hour-long session to a close, he offered audience members the opportunity to talk further with Griffiths and Flaherty. More than a quarter of the audience remained for another half-hour asking questions and seeking more information about Champion's complete single and multi-family housing product lines! When was the last time you saw that sort of response from builders?

The Host

The Urban Land Institute, founded in 1936, is headquartered in Washington, D.C. and boasts 34,000 members worldwide! For most professional real estate practitioners, ULI is viewed as the preeminent international body relative to land-use research, policy recommendation and business practice.

This year's Urban Land Expo offered the factory-built housing industry a unique opportunity to showcase how factory-built homes can play a stronger role in smart, forward-looking land development with homes available to them just about anywhere.

This year's display home resulted from much planning and effort on the part of ULI members affiliated with its Manufactured Housing Communities Council ('MHCC'). One of ULI's nearly four dozen product development councils, the MHCC, during its' scant four years of existence, has emerged as a 'think tank' of sorts for manufactured and modular housing, along with the land-lease community real estate asset class.

MHCC membership is limited to 50 full-ULI members. The council meets several times a year and sets its' own agenda, usually reflective of issues and matters of immediate and future interest to its members. During the MHCC's meeting in Las Vegas in October 2007, members heard and participated in presentations regarding real estate mortgage and chattel (personal property) lending, as well as first-hand success stories on on-site financing of homes in land-lease communities. The council also identified topics and priorities for future meetings, including an intense discussion regarding the council's ongoing and future relationship with sister organization, the Manufactured Housing Institute's National Communities Council.

Summary

No doubt about it. Champion Enterprises, Inc., and factory-built housing hit the proverbial 'home run' at the recent ULI meeting and trade show in Las Vegas!

The positive response to this stellar hands-on opportunity to 'see, smell and feel' the design, quality, and flexibility available in this contemporary modern housing continues to reverberate among ULI's members and leadership. Even the Manufactured Housing Institute ('MHI') experienced positive after-effects of the ULI exhibit, as Internet and telephone inquiries about modern housing increased noticeably during the weeks following the Urban Land Expo.

ULI President Rosan was so impressed with the display home and the enthusiasm of the near-constant stream of ULI members inspecting it, he speculated on hosting an expanded modular-manufactured housing exhibit next year at ULI's meeting in Miami, Fla. ■

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The factory-built housing industry has also been directly involved in showcasing its new generation of high-quality, affordable homes at the recently developed Show Village at the National Association of Home Builders' annual International Builders Show (IBS). Earlier in 2007, Palm Harbor Homes and Nationwide Custom Homes displayed several modular homes to the approximately 70,000 IBS attendees. Current plans call for both companies to repeat their display at the upcoming 2008 IBS.

Developed by *Professional Builder* magazine, the Show Village has proven so successful that the magazine was named as the *Media Industry Newsletter's* 2007 Best Integrated Marketing Campaign. Through alliances with component suppliers, the Show Village provides a unique opportunity for the factory-built housing industry to spotlight the tremendous advances taking place in the industry.

"I cannot think of any single event that has had a more positive impact on the acceptance of modular and HUD-Code construction into mainstream home construction and the minds of builders than the Show Village," stated Colleen Rogers, vice president of branding and advertising for Palm Harbor Homes. "I know we are always hearing about a public relations campaign to raise the image of factory-built homes. But, in my mind, this is the best public relations campaign of all."

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