

**UNIQUELY DURHAM****Liza LEEDs  
the way**

Innovation and commitment earns green builder honours

**HEATHER M. O'CONNOR**  
Special to Sun Media

Last summer, when Liza Homes released phase two of their Heritage Village development in Whitby, the company made a landmark commitment to their buyers and the environment: Energy Star, an upgrade in phase one, would come standard. Each home would come equipped with Energy Star-rated appliances, high-performance windows and high-efficiency furnaces. Each family would save on their heat and hydro bills with the energy-stingy, well-insulated homes. Every home would be backed by Energy Star's third-party verification.

But the Durham Region builder strove for more than that.

"We wanted to set a standard for building for the ages," says Liza vice-president Maryam Mansouri. "We are in constant pursuit of innovative materials and techniques in the construction of each new community we build."

The builder searched for ways to take Energy Star further, starting with an examination of the materials they used and a determination to include more recycled content. Dissatisfied with the textural and architectural quality of the vinyl siding used in the first phase of Heritage Village, they chose instead to use HardiePlank lap siding, a recycled cement material, in phase two. They also employed two other recycled materials: a composite wood product for the exterior railings and recycled PVC in the window trim.

This commitment earned Liza Homes the 2008 Green Builder of the Year award from the Durham Region Home Builders' Associa-

tion. For pushing the green envelope, they won an additional award for technical innovation.

Liza Homes built 300 Energy Star homes in three communities over a two-year span. Rather than resting on its green laurels, however, the company pursued a demanding new green building program: LEED-H.

LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) originated in the commercial, industrial and institutional sector. It was adopted by the high-rise residential sector and is now spreading into sustainable design for neighbourhoods (LEED-ND) and homes (LEED-H.)

There are eight categories in the LEED-H program in which builders can earn points. The greater the total, the higher the level of certification.

In the year leading up to the June 2008 launch of LEED for Homes, the Canada Green Building Council invited Liza Homes to join a select group of green Canadian builders to trial the new program. Liza proposed a case study with The Shorelands, their Whitby lakeside community of street and stacked townhomes. With just a month to launch, Mansouri is excited to share what's in store.

"We did a lot of research into deciding the scale of our involvement with the program," Mansouri says. "We knew the learning curve would be steep and bringing the green elements and details into the development might be difficult. But we made a decision to take it to the next level and offer it in the entire community. We're still researching some of the features we can bring."

Mansouri likes the Innovation

and Design category of LEED-H. "It promotes creativity and allows you to provide something that is outside the standard expectations."

Creative options like the 24 studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom units set aside at The Shorelands for buyers seeking wheelchair-accessible universal design. The development also features progressive elements like a vegetated green roof on the amenity building and solar-powered streetlights.

The Materials and Resources category looks at the cycle of the materials used: where they come from, how they're made, how they get here, how much recyclable content they contain. Says Mansouri, "It made us take a step back and see where we could make improvements."

One key improvement is a switch from wood framing to steel construction. The steel is recycled from scrap cars; six vehicles provide enough steel to frame a 2000-square-foot home.

The Awareness and Education category encourages builders to spread the word about their eco-

friendly accomplishments. Mansouri says Shorelands homeowners will receive a manual that describes what they're getting and how to maintain it.

"It lets them know what's behind the skin and the skeleton and the flesh and the blood of their community and how to make it part of their lifestyle."

Educating the tradespeople who work on the homes and the sales staff who communicate the technology to prospective buyers is also part of their plan.

Liza vice-president Maryam Mansouri (left) and director of construction Mike McCabe (right) accept the 2008 Green Builder of the Year award from Michelle Cote of EnerQuality Corp.



Liza's Heritage Village project (centre) earned the company the 2008 Green Builder of the Year Award. The Shorelands (above) will be a LEED-H (LEED for Homes) community in Whitby.