

Builder blows into Florida

BrownStone Builders will develop hurricane-resistant luxury homes in Tampa and Apopka.

[FINAL Edition]

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Custom home builder and developer BrownStone Builders & Associates, which wowed crowds at the International Builders' Show last month with its high-tech, hurricane-resistant house, is entering the Florida market.

BrownStone, based in Landenberg, Pa., dismantled its showcase home in the Orange County Convention Center parking lot and will truck it to a new community it is developing near Tampa, a 52-home gated project called Porte de la Mer.



BrownStone, which is partnering with Palm Harbor Homes to build the exclusive development on the Alafia River with homes from about \$650,000 to well more than \$1 million, has even bigger plans for a project near Apopka.



"We really like Florida. The state has a lot of potential," said BrownStone Partner Frank X. Daly. The state's strong growth, healthy economy, low taxes, pro-business environment, long coastline and many other factors make it particularly appealing, Daly said.

Managing Partner James R. Brown Sr. said Florida sets a high bar for entry into the state, and building codes are always being improved. "Florida has really tough standards, some of the toughest in the nation. That's what I like to see," Brown said. "With some states, you just pay a

fee and you're in. That's not the way it works in Florida."

The Porte de la Mer development south of Tampa will be the first "certified" by NextGen, a consortium of manufacturers producing so-called smart-home products. The high-tech gizmos, security-monitoring systems and energy-efficient devices in the homes are all interconnected.

The homes, crafted inside Palm Harbor's climate-controlled fabrication centers in Plant City, are designed to withstand hurricane-force winds.

"That's the only kind of home we will build anywhere in Florida, not just near the coast but inland as well -- so people can have peace of mind," Brown said.

The wood homes are crafted and put together, from the walls to the roof, at Palm Harbor's subassembly sites, then taken apart and trucked to final construction sites in three or four sections.

The units are all interconnected to withstand 150-mph winds, to meet the state's recently

toughened wind codes, said Steve Reyenga, a Palm Harbor vice president in the Addison, Texas, headquarters near Dallas.

Plans for the Apopka project are still being developed, but the homes there will be 7,000 to 10,000 square feet, on multiacre lots, and will cost "\$1 million plus," said Mike Wnek, Palm Harbor senior vice president for the Southeast region.

"They should be absolutely gorgeous," Wnek said. "Big homes, big lots," with an equestrian theme for horse lovers.

Details and a timetable are still in flux, but land for 40 to 50 homes sites is in hand north of U.S. Highway 441 between Apopka and Zellwood, Wnek said.

Right now, though, BrownStone and Palm Harbor are focusing on the south Tampa project and awaiting final permits before construction begins.

"We hope to set the first one within 60 to 90 days," Wnek said.

The BrownStone NextGen Peace of Mind demonstration home that was on display in the convention center parking lot -- one of four put up by Palm Harbor for display -- is currently inside one of Palm Harbor's fabrication buildings in Plant City, awaiting the final permits.

Most of the one- to three-story homes to be built at the Alafia River site will sell for more than \$1 million, Wnek said, particularly those with river frontage -- long, narrow lots that make maximum use of the waterfront.

"There are some magnificent views on the river," Wnek said.

PHOTO: The NextGen Peace of Mind house is on display at the Orange County Convention Center during the builder's show last month. BOBBY COKER/ORLANDO SENTINEL . BOX: BROWNSTONE BUILDERS & ASSOCIATES HEADQUARTERS: Landenberg, Pa. BUSINESS: Luxury-home builder and developer. MANAGING PARTNER: James R. Brown Sr. FIRST FLORIDA PROJECT: Porte de la Mer, on the Alafia River south of Tampa. HOMES: Factory-built in sections by Palm Harbor Homes, designed for final construction on site to withstand 150-mph winds. FEATURES: Homes will have in-home storm shelter, energy-efficient insulation and technology, corrosion-resistant plumbing, unique fire- protection system, wireless technology, oven that can be controlled from any computer or phone. WHAT'S AHEAD: A luxury, equestrian-oriented project on multiacre lots near Apopka with homes that will sell for \$1 million plus. SOURCES: BrownStone Builders & Associates, Palm Harbor Homes

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