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FORT WORTH

'Where The West Begins' ★

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Business



PERRY PROMOTES FUND

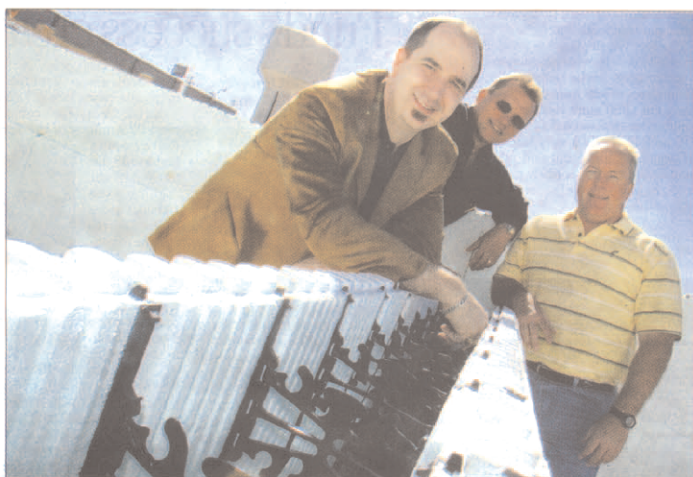
Texas Gov. Rick Perry touts the Enterprise Fund and a plan to begin a technology fund. **2c**

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BRAZIL RECONSIDERS: South American country decides against buying fighter jets after all. **2c**

THE SAVVY CONSUMER



Randy McGuffee, left, and Cameron Ware, center, of FutureStone and Randy Brock of Canyon Homes display insulating concrete forms being used to build the Lake Country Villa Townhomes. SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM/RICHARD W. RODRIGUEZ

A building material that's resistant to high energy bills, tornadoes, fire, mold and termites, and it's likely that Texas consumers' interest will be

Set in Concrete

Tarrant County home buyers have a new option to help combat such homeowner headaches as high energy bills, tornadoes, mold and termites.

Poured concrete walls are the solution found by a growing number of consumers and a handful of manufacturers and builders.

And the pace is picking up.

Canyon Homes is building a 33-unit condominium project on the ninth fairway of Eagle Mountain Country Club, 25 minutes north of downtown Fort Worth.

"We had a steady stream of traffic when we poured one unit last Friday," said Randy Brock, Canyon Homes president. "But two different people came back later

with house plans and asked me if I could use this material on their houses. That's incredible for a builder—it's like moths to a light."

A larger project using the insulated concrete forms is an 82-lot house development at MotorSport Ranch in Cresson. There, developers needed a fire resistant and soundproof material to build homes around a race car performance track and turned to insulated concrete forms, or ICFs.

Carol and Tom Misfelt, who are building a 2,600-square-foot home near Benbrook, said they were searching for a way to lower their energy bills when they came across ICFs.

"One of our main criteria was energy efficiency," Carol Misfelt said. "These walls require half as much tonnage in an air conditioning unit and have a 50 R factor [for energy efficiency] instead of a 17 R factor for wood."

There's not much to find wrong with poured concrete. Except for a deeper window sill—11 inches versus the standard 8—there are no visible differences between a concrete and wood-framed house.



Concrete is poured between these plastic forms to insulate and strengthen them. SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM/RICHARD W. RODRIGUEZ

Savvy: Poured-concrete forms have advantages for home builders



SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM/RICHARD W. RODRIGUEZ

Texas is the leader in construction using insulated concrete forms, with more than 5,000 houses built in the state each year with the technology.

And the extra cost is less than 5 percent, said Randy McGuffee, a partner in FutureStone, the Texas distributor of an insulated concrete form product from Canada.

There are a number of distinctive qualities to poured concrete walls, according to manufacturers and industry associations. For one, they are twice as energy efficient as wood, enabling homeowners to reduce monthly energy costs.

Concrete is also nine times stronger than wood, making it more resistant to tornadoes and hurricanes, one of the reasons for its emerging popularity in Galveston and on Padre Island.

Its fire, wind, insect and mildew resistance prompted the Legislature to pass a law in 2003 to require discounts on home-

owner insurance for Texans with concrete houses. A further strengthening of that law is being discussed in the Legislature this session.

Texas is the leader in ICF construction, with more than 5,000 houses built in the state each year with the technology, said Joe Lyman, executive director of the Insulating Concrete Forms Association in Chicago. The ICF market in the state is growing about 25 percent each year, he added.

Concrete is replacing wood at a rapid rate nationally as well, particularly in the coastal areas, said Dawn Faull, program manager for the Concrete Home Building Council of the National Association of Home Builders.

In 2003, more than 16 percent of all new houses were made with

concrete walls, up from 2 percent a decade earlier, she said. "Next year, we see that doubling," Faull said.

Concrete walls have become a popular replacement in hurricane-ravaged Florida and in areas where there is interest in energy efficiency, she said. While most of the walls are with made with concrete masonry blocks for their strength and soundproof qualities, the blocks don't have the energy efficiency of ICFs, which control about 4 percent of the total new home building market.

Faull backs up the claims by manufacturers of the walls' strength and energy efficiency and their resistance to mold and insects. But she cautions consumers to check out prospective contractors and to ensure that the builder uses workers trained and certified in building with concrete forms.

Home buyers are the driving force behind replacing wood with concrete, Faull said.

"Consumers are becoming much more educated on home building,"

she said. "They are going to make the change to concrete happen."

Teresa McUsic's column appears
Mondays and Fridays.
www.SavvyConsumer.net

