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Publisher's Note

Registration for NAHB International Builder's Show opens in September! The show will be held January 19-21, 2016 at the Las Vegas Convention Center, Las Vegas, NV.

The NAHB International Builders' Show® (IBS) is the largest annual light construction show in the world, every year attracting 50,000 visitors from more than 100 countries.

IBS brings together the industry's most important global manufacturers and suppliers and showcases the latest products,

materials and technologies involved in all types of buildings – including wood, concrete, stone and brick. See more than 400,000 net square feet of exhibits and 1,300 manufacturers and suppliers of the latest and most in-demand products and services.

And now you can see even more of what the building universe has to offer in one trip through Design & Construction Week® (DCW). DCW features the co-location of the NAHB International Builders' Show®

(IBS) and the National Kitchen & Bath Association's Kitchen & Bath Industry Show (KBIS). Registered IBS attendees have access to the exhibit floors of all DCW shows.

This issue features Solis Builders of Louisiana. Rodney and Shirlene Bender are showcasing their lovely 2015 AHBA Parade Home in Audubon Plantation.

Enjoy,
April Becquet



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April Becquet

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Kathy Stolz

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Graham Goodyear

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REGISTRATION STARTS IN SEPTEMBER



For information (337) 371-7894 fax: (337) 800-447-1851
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Solis Builders Elevate Energy Efficiency

By Kathy Bowen Stolz

Cold and heat can have a lot in common when it comes to building a house, according to Rodney and Shirlene Bender of Solis Builders.

These Lafayette-based contractors learned building techniques to maximize energy efficiency in Wisconsin's cold climate, the same techniques they are using to cut electric bills for their clients in Louisiana.

"We use the latest in materials and technology to maximize energy efficiency. To us cooling a house efficiently is just as important as heating a house efficiently. That mindset is just now coming down this

way," Shirlene said. "We're not really 'green' builders, but reducing electric bills is really important to us.

"People don't realize that there's more to energy efficiency than insulation. We chose a HVAC company to work with who understands our mindset. We also taught our framers to adapt to handle the insulation required. And we chose insulation installers who were willing to learn."

She added, "We prefer a manifold system in our plumbing. We also had to find a plumber who was willing to learn to do things the way we wanted. We're particular about the way we

want things done, so we're particular about the subcontractors we use."

Solis Builders constructed a house in the 2015 Parade of Homes which emphasizes energy efficiency through technology. "It's very air tight. We encapsulated the building with sprayed foam insulation. We also put in three very high efficiency HVAC units," Shirlene noted.

"We wired it for home automation if the homeowner wants to add it. The thermostat, alarm and even the shower heads in the master suite can be remotely controlled," she added. "You can control the whole house through your smart phone or

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CORE BRANDS SMART TECHNOLOGIES

AFFORD WOUNDED VETERAN INDEPENDENT LIVING IN NEW SMART HOME

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Staff Sergeant Rusty Dunagan receives brand new smart home in Oklahoma through the Gary Sinise Foundation with support from Core Brands.

PETALUMA, CALIFORNIA, June 15, 2015 – A wounded soldier's return to civilian life may be one of the hardest life transitions in the modern age. Today, the Gary Sinise Foundation, with the support of Core Brands, other technology manufacturers, and on-site contractors, unveiled the latest in a series of specially adapted custom "Smart Homes" built through the Foundation's R.I.S.E. Program, specifically to make everyday home life as easy as possible for severely wounded vets.

Rusty Lee Dunagan always felt he would join the Army, and after the attacks on September 11, 2001 his resolve only grew stronger. In 2006 he enlisted and was stationed in Afghanistan. On September 21, 2010, Dunagan, who was 30 at the time, was training a group of soldiers on patrol when he encountered a roadside IED, causing him to lose both legs and his left arm. Today, after more than 30 surgeries, Dunagan and his family moved into a new Edmond, Oklahoma home that will give Rusty all the independence and comfort modern technologies and design can provide.

"In July of 2012, we received an email from Rusty's Aunt, Susan



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Porter, sharing Rusty's story and his rehabilitation process," Gary Sinise Foundation Executive Director Judith Otter explained. "After speaking with Susan, Rusty, and his wife, Angie, we knew that we wanted to help this family heal and provide them with the home that they deserve."

The home was built with Rusty's mobility at the forefront of the design. "As the 23rd surviving triple amputee, Rusty needed a home that allowed him maximum mobility in his wheelchair," Otter continued. "Due to the nature of his injuries, Rusty does not use prosthetics, so this was the key component for helping Rusty regain his independence."

The Gary Sinise Foundation relied on individual, corporate, non-profit donors, in-kind sponsors, and the local community's support to make this project a reality. "I worked closely with the Gary Sinise Foundation and an incredibly supportive group of manufacturers, builders, designers and contractors who donated their time, their skills and their products to make this home a reality and give Rusty as much control over his home life as possible," said Joel Berrettini of IT and Media Solutions, who installed much of the life-simplifying electronics in the Dunagan's new home. "The main way the family experiences these technologies is through the ELAN control system that allows them to control their lighting, heating, TV, music, security and door locks from touch panels mounted throughout the home, ELAN remotes, even their iPad."

With everything in the home custom-considered for Dunagan's use, it looks a bit different than your average Oklahoma home. The doorways in this single-floor residence are all four feet wide and

are completely flat to making moving from room to room easy. The kitchen island and some countertops are up to 10 inches lower than standard, the master bathroom has a vanity with room underneath for his wheelchair to get up close, and the wheel-in shower has a tiled bench so he can get in and out completely on his own. But according to Dunagan, even the little things take some getting used to.

"I was left-handed," Dunagan said, "so when I was doing rehabilitation I was almost starting from scratch with my right hand. I'm a righty shooter and I used a computer mouse with my right hand, but not much else. I spent time each day in rehab writing out of a textbook just like I did in grade school, and it was really important to me. As of this January I'm working for a local Oklahoma

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with access to the internet,” Rodney pointed out. We also include a structured wiring system in all of our homes to include Home run phones lines, TV outlets and a home computer networks.

“We’ve found younger buyers are really into technology. With this house, they say, ‘Oh, great! Technology!’ But some of the older buyers say, ‘Ugh! Too much technology!’” Shirlene added.

“When something new comes on the market, we like to try it. We’re very progressive that way,” Shirlene said. The Benders learn of those new ideas through the many builders journals they read in addition to seminars they attend and the internet searches they make.

Their 3,500 sq ft Parade of Homes entry’s monthly electricity bill was only \$170 despite its three HVAC systems and a low temperature setting, Rodney noted.

Shirlene said, “We’re very proud of the Parade home. Its features, including landscaping, set it apart, but they’re not just bling. We’re concerned about our homes lasting a long time; it’s in how they’re built. We build every house as if we’re going to live in it.”

Primarily Solis Builders prefers to do custom home building, constructing only five houses in a typical year because it wants to maintain a personal touch with its clients. Rodney is on the job site every day because “when you’re not there, you miss things.” Solis builds custom homes in all price ranges and sizes, even in the \$1 million range. As general contractors, the Benders also do remodeling, additions and outdoor



Photos by Chimaera Photography



Photo by Chimaera Photography

kitchens.

Because Shirlene holds a commercial contractors' license also, Solis Builders does an occasional small commercial project, such as the doctor's office it recently completed.

Shirlene is also CAPS certified. She and Rodney find that universal design that encourages aging in place is becoming increasingly attractive for Lafayette-area homebuyers. Many people in their 40s and 50s begin to think of how they might age in place in their new home. Elements such as the heights of light switches and countertops take on new meaning, she said. Rodney noted that they routinely put wider doors and hallways in their homes to make them more attractive to all future homeowners.

Customer service is a focus for Rodney and Shirlene. "Our goal is to make sure all the little things are taken care of. Our goal is not to have to return to our homes for

service calls. We've never had a bad experience with one of our clients. We've never had a horror story like some builders. We've never been afraid to be friends with or face our clients after we finish their homes," Shirlene said.

The Benders relocated to Lafayette eight years ago after visiting some of Shirlene's family in the area. "We came down here at a time when everything [construction] was almost stopping in Wisconsin, where we lived. But everything was going good here in Louisiana. It was a good time to make the move," she said. "We started by doing renovations and additions because the market for custom homes was down."

They brought the Solis Builders name with them. Shirlene said, "We kept the Solis name, my maiden name, because of my dad. I felt a connection to my family that way. My father was a builder, a carpenter/contractor, who had an office in our home in the Chicago area. Growing

up I would go into his office to talk to him, and he would show me blueprints and how to price and bid houses."

With two brothers and a sister, Shirlene is the one child who has spent the most time in the building industry. "We always laughed that my dad was so surprised that I was the one who followed in his footsteps." She is the second born.

"I later worked for other builders, and then my first husband and I started Solis Builders. It went well, very well. People commented that they could see a woman's touch in our homes because of the details," Shirlene said. Her son, a very talented and imaginative carpenter according to his mother, joined the business too. "It was quite interesting to have family involved in a business that way."

After her first husband passed away she eventually married Rodney. He was ready to retire from a 28-year

career as a sheriff's deputy in Racine, Wisconsin when he joined the company. He didn't expect to become a builder ("I thought I was retiring!"), but he bought a CAD software package to dabble with drawing plans. Shirlene taught him the business.

An elementary school teacher in a

previous career, nowadays Shirlene works full-time for the Southwest Louisiana Area Health Education Center. However, she still focuses on Solis Builders in the evenings.

Both she and Rodney enjoy working with people, especially young couples who are so excited when they are building a home. "It's so encouraging

when clients like your work. It makes us happy to see their happiness and to know that they're going to love living in that home," Shirlene said.

During the next five years the Benders plan to "build, build, build" because of the demand for houses in the Lafayette area.

And no doubt local homebuyers will continue to demand Solis Builders "progressive" homes.



*You may contact Solis Builders at
337-896-5536 or
rodney@solisbuilders.com or
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Congressman as his military liaison, attending functions on his behalf and handling a lot of veterans affairs, which keeps me busy. It's good to be working and helping other vets acclimate to civilian life and get their deserved medical care and benefits."

To minimize obstacles in the new home, builder Jim Bowers designed it with six exterior doors, four to the backyard and two to the front. Dunagan and the family can get to the backyard from the master bedroom, the great room, a hallway near the main living area, and the kids play room. All six of these doors, plus the interior garage door, have Qwikset electronic door locks that automatically lock and can be accessed through the ELAN system, and can send alerts to the owners by email or text message when a door is opened.

Dunagan continued, "Adapting to civilian life is challenging, because you lose some of the camaraderie, structure and support the military provides, so any little thing that makes our lives easier and gives me more time to spend with the family, or not worrying about the house, is a big bonus. Plus, now that I work with the Congressman I get to be involved in a lot of military events again, so I'm thrilled to be able to contribute as a member of the community." "The first thing I did when the Gary Sinise

Foundation told me the home would have smart home tech was check it out on YouTube," Dunagan said. "My wife and I were amazed at what modern technology can do in homes, and it was even more surprising in person. Something like electronic door locks is a huge deal, because it means I don't have to go check each door at night to make sure the house is safe. I can just open the app, and if any doors aren't locked, I can lock them wirelessly from anywhere."



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If Dunagan wants to see what his kids are doing while he's at work, he can view the five-acre property on the ELAN mobile app thanks to eight outdoor surveillance cameras and an Interlogix Concord4 security system. Berrettini actually took the covers off the cameras because they were white and stood out so much, and hand painted them to match the home's exterior brick. The final safety measure in the home is a first for the Gary Sinise Foundation – a safe room designed to withstand Oklahoma's notorious tornadoes. Built completely from concrete and connected to the home's generator and ELAN system, this room provides the family an escape from the elements in the most dire situations.

“We wanted to ensure that Rusty had maximum mobility and independence when he was home,” Gary Sinise Foundation Senior



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Construction Project Manager Scott Schaeperkoetter stated. “In order to do this, we had to properly identify each adaptation that needed to be included in the home. For example,

there is a possibility of extreme weather in Oklahoma, so we had to make sure that all of the necessary safety precautions were taken and that they were all accessible to Rusty.”

Berrettini added, “Another challenge we faced was the remote location of the home. That’s why a generator was an absolute necessity, and why we chose to install satellite TV and satellite internet service for the family. This way they have the knowledge that they will always have power and always be connected, no matter what the weather or circumstances might be. There are little things like this that we take for granted, and out here in Oklahoma some extra things have to be considered.”

With three Lutron thermostats, 67 light switches and nearly 30 motorized QMotion window shades throughout the home, the family can customize their environment to be the most comfortable at any given time. Programmed schedules provide a daily balance of lighting and heating, while any room or light can be adjusted with just a few taps in the ELAN mobile app. This convenient control scheme extends to the home’s four TVs and multi-room audio system as well. Even when the family is in the backyard, Dunagan can use his iPad to play his favorite music on the outdoor audio system while he monitors the yard’s sprinkler system through the app to ensure his lawn gets enough water.

The backyard will be a haven of sorts for Dunagan, with two ponds

that will be stocked with fish and a large swath of area for his kids to grow up in the great outdoors. The five kids will inhabit three bedrooms, with the oldest in her own room, the two middle-aged boys sharing a room and the two youngest sharing a room. Everyone can use the audio and video components of the ELAN system, and it’s easy enough for even the 5-year-old to choose his movies and music.

“A big part of what we do at the Gary Sinise Foundation is raise awareness for the issues that our servicemen and women face while engaging communities to support their hometown heroes,” Otter concluded. “We were so thrilled with the incredible support from the local Edmond community and thankful that many national partners, such as Core Brands, provided key technology to help us complete this project. Rusty now has as much independence as possible in his home, which is a huge success for everyone involved.”

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