

## cover story

# Winning with concrete

## Stick builders make the switch to ICFs

**F**lorida contractor Juddy Carter felt like a stick in the mud. His company, Carter Construction, built wood frame homes. It was what Carter had been doing for 18 years. But he was ready for change.

Last winter, Carter dropped his hammer to break free from his comfort zone. He made the switch to insulating concrete forms.

"I knew right away that this would be the right project for us," says Carter, referring to Madera, a "green" community planned for a 44-acre wooded site adjacent to the University of Florida in Gainesville. Madera was developed by Greentrust, LLC through a partnership with the University of Florida's Energy Extension Service. In a few weeks, Carter's project will stand as the first of 88 homes planned for the community. Carter worked with ICF manufacturer ECO-Block on the

project.

"Building is building, and changing to ICFs was easy," he says. "Of course, this is our first ICF house. But ECO-Block provided hands-on training that really showed us how to make building fast and simple. Now, in addition to Madera, we're developing floor plans for more ICF homes. They'll be affordably priced from the low \$100,000s and range from 1,400 to 2,000 square feet."

Trademark Builders, rurally located in Montgomery County, Ala., has quickly moved toward building with ICFs. Owners Kent and Terry McKee see working with ICFs as a sensible move.

"We've really developed a niche," says Terry McKee.

**"In my opinion, builders who don't broaden their capabilities are putting their businesses at risk.**

**The ICF industry is growing at a rapid rate."**

**-Bill Blair  
Kansas builder**



After insulating concrete forms are in place (top), workers place concrete between the expanded polystyrene shells to create walls that can withstand tornado-strength winds.

Carter Construction plans to build ICF homes in Florida priced from the low \$100,000s (right).

ECO-Block photos



"We offer both stick-built and ICF houses for the same price. Of course, most of our customers choose ICFs.

"Time and again I'll bring a customer into one of the homes we've built with ECO-Block and the first thing they do is comment on how quiet it is," she says. "Then we tell them about its energy savings and how the walls withstand tornado-strength winds and they're sold."

Such is the case with consumers. But builders are smart people, so why do some shy away from ICFs? Kansas builder Bill Blair can only speculate.

"Builders are resistant to change," says Blair. "It's that simple. I know. I started as a framing contractor more than 25 years ago and stick-frame construction is what I was used to doing. Then I met Tom Rives from ICF Solutions and I became hooked.

"In my opinion, builders who don't broaden their capabilities are putting their businesses at risk. The ICF industry is growing at a rapid rate."

Mike Caskey, a builder in Saint Marys, Pa., admits that he likes to try new things.

"Technology appeals to me," says Caskey. "That's why I was drawn to trying ICFs. Now I'm doing my first ICF job, a 400-square foot addition to an older middle-class home in Saint Marys.

"I don't think I'll be going back to stick-frame building. There's no waste. The jobsite stays clean because there's no sawdust. When my customers come home for lunch they break into big smiles because they see how fast the walls are going up."

Caskey's foray into ICFs is already generating new business.

"I've had 15 people stop to look the site over and I've already given four separate estimates," says Caskey. "They want to learn more when I tell them about the potential for energy savings and its durability."

When talking about ICFs' easy-to-use process, builders who have taken the leap are in agreement. It elimi-

nates several steps — such as sheathing and insulating the exterior walls — that are necessary with wood-frame construction. Made of expanded polystyrene, ICFs stack and lock into place much like Legos. Once in place, concrete fills the forms to create strong walls while providing excellent built-in insulation.

"Working with ICFs is easy once you learn to use concrete," says Robert Warren of Tommy Thrash construction, a builder based in Brandon, Miss. A stick-frame builder with an eye for opportunity, Warren's portfolio includes shopping centers, warehouses, office buildings, and homes.

"The South has been hit hard by tornados the last couple of years, so offering ICFs as an upgrade makes sense," says Warren. "For us, that's been its biggest selling point. It doesn't matter whether it's a residential or

commercial job, our customers want to feel safe. We just finished a 3,000-square foot office building in Brandon for a group of attorneys — customers who know the importance of security."

With building owners reporting savings of up to 50 percent in utility costs, ICFs' use in residential and commercial construction continues to grow. Its strong, long-lasting, energy-efficient, and environmentally friendly reputation creates a win for both consumers and builders.

Says Terry McKee of Trademark Builders, "We get big ol' hugs from our customers. With ECO-Block's versatility, we can build anything they want. They're always thrilled with the outcome." ♦

For more information on ECO-Block, circle reader service number 20.



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