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First Home Builders of Florida Makes Impact Resistant Glass Standard for First Time Homebuyers

Company Prepares for Hurricane Season with Round-the-Clock Protection for Buyers

BUYING ONE'S FIRST HOME CAN BE AN EMOTIONAL, YET EXHILARATING EXPERIENCE. BUT ONE "THRILL" MOST YOUNG HOMEOWNERS WOULD PREFER TO BYPASS IS THEIR FIRST HURRICANE. AS THE LARGEST HOMEBUILDER FOR FIRST TIME OWNERS IN LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA, FIRST HOME BUILDERS OF FLORIDA IS UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO UNDERSTAND THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF THOSE JUST STARTING OUT. BECAUSE OF THE COMPANY'S LOCATION ALONG FLORIDA'S WESTERN COAST, THE POSSIBILITY OF HURRICANES IS SOMETHING THE COMPANY CONTINUALLY MUST CONSIDER IN EVERY ASPECT OF THEIR PLANNING AND BUILDING PROCESS.

As demonstrated during the 2004 Florida hurricane season, opening protection can mean the difference between minimal damage and structural collapse of a building. First Home Builders of Florida has made the choice to offer passive opening protection through the use of impact resistant laminated windows to minimize the risks of unprotected homes.

Although the Florida Building Code allows for various means of storm protection, such as plywood, storm panels, other shutters or a partially enclosed design which keeps the roof on but destroys the contents, First Home Builders understands that the last thing a homeowner wants to worry about is trying to protect the windows before a storm. Or in the case of 2004, putting shutters up and taking them down between storms, which can be costly and dangerous. Even if hired contractors are used to install and remove the storm panels they are not always available prior to the storm's arrival, leaving the homes vulnerable. First Home Builders of Florida has made the decision to provide homes with passive window protection that has been designed and engineered to resist objects being hurled at hurricane-force winds as a standard feature going forward.

Fred Hermann President of First Home Builders of Florida (left) and Bob Kasper of Great Southern Window & Door (right)

"We build thousands of homes in Lee County every year," notes Michael Guyet, purchasing manager with First Home Builders of Florida. "While the storm panels that we previously offered provided storm protection, we became concerned for our homeowners about the necessity of installation before a storm. With a hurricane looming off the coast, it can be increasingly difficult to get storm panels installed. We disliked the thought of thousands of First Home homeowners scrambling to find their panels, properly installing them, or trying to find someone at the last minute to get it done for them. After witnessing the devastation that so many Floridians experienced during the '04 hurricane season, we'd rather have our homeowners be able to concentrate on keeping themselves safe without having to worry about securing their homes and belongings."

First Home Builders was approached with an alternative to storm panels by Great Southern Window and Door, one of their long term window installation subcontractors. Great Southern had recognized the issue and reached out to Milestone® impact resistant laminated glass windows by Florida Extruders International, Inc., (FEI) a leading Florida window manufacturer. FEI produces impact resistant laminated glass by permanently bonding KeepSafe Maximum®, a tough polyvinyl butyral (PVB) protective interlayer, between two pieces of glass under heat and pressure. "It is great to work with a builder who selects performance over costs in order to offer a superior product to the consumer," says Barry Dombchik, marketing manager at Florida Extruders.

"Our company's goal is to build quality homes at prices first time home buyers can afford," notes Fred Hermann, president at First Home Builders of Florida. "Although impact resistant windows cost more than regular windows with steel storm panels, we

determined that the increased cost was justified by the numerous benefits laminated glass has to offer. Milestone quality impact resistant glass windows have become a standard feature in all of our homes."

Having laminated glass instead of storm panels also benefits homeowners after the hurricane has passed. After a hurricane, when power is often out and the possibility of further inclement weather looms, homeowners with solid storm panels are left trapped in homes without light. Light is not a problem for homeowners with laminated glass windows, as they function like other windows, letting plenty of light in.

"Customer reactions to the laminated glass have been very positive," says Guyet. "We have laminated glass windows installed next to regular windows in some of our model homes, so customers can actually knock on the windows and feel the difference. We also have a KeepSafe Maximum sample interlayer available so customers can actually feel the tough PVB interlayer and become confident in the windows' overall performance against wind-borne debris."

According to Janet Shaffer, a sales representative with First Home Builders of Florida, and the 2005 recipient of the National Association of Home Builders Top Salesperson in the Nation award, "Our customers are extremely pleased to know that they won't have to be physically putting shutters on their home in the event of a hurricane. They express surprise at the fact that impact windows are a standard feature in our homes compared to other homebuilders in our area that they have visited."

Although hurricane protection was the primary reason behind switching to impact resistant laminated glass windows, First Home Builders' homeowners have also come to appreciate its other benefits. Aesthetically, impact resistant glass alleviates the need for unsightly shutter frames, and homeowners need not worry about storing large shutters. Laminated glass also provides passive home protection 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is difficult to penetrate - even for would-be thieves with baseball bats or hammers - so the home remains secure when owners are away. The plastic interlayer in the glass also offers a significant acoustic benefit, allowing homeowners to have a quiet atmosphere inside regardless of lawnmowers and noisy neighbors.

According to Guyet, First Home Builders has been pleased with the switch from shutters to laminated glass windows. "The customers are happy, and we're happy," he says. "It is a tremendous relief to know that our homeowners and their homes will be well-protected - without complicated preparations - in the event of severe weather."

"We have many great trade partner relationships," notes Hermann. "However, the relationship between a home builder, a trade contractor and a supplier best demonstrates how we can put our customers' needs first. We all win."

Established in 1996 to serve the housing needs on entry level and first time new home buyers, First Home Builders of Florida is now the largest single-family home builder in Lee County, Florida. First Home Builders has been named among the Top 100 Builders in the Nation by Builder magazine and the Giants of the Industry by Professional Builder Magazine and has received the prestigious Horizon Council award as one of the top six businesses in Southwest Florida. In 2001, First Home Builders was awarded the Crystal Eagle Award for five years of continuous excellence in customer service, an esteemed award given to one company every five years.

Vertical Integration Drives Company's Sales of Impact-Resistant Laminated Glass Windows & Doors

Florida Extruders International, Inc. is a vertically integrated low cost domestic aluminum billet producer, aluminum extruder, powder coat finisher, building products distributor, and manufacturer of Milestone® windows and sliding glass doors. The company has been ranked by "Window & Door Magazine" as one of the Top 100 residential window manufacturers in North America and is recognized as one of the largest privately held companies in Florida.

FEI also produces their own impact-resistant laminated glass which enables them to control costs and better service the industry. "Our sales of fenestration products with impact glass have skyrocketed over the last few years and we expect this trend to continue" says Joel Lehman, President. Barry Dombchik, Marketing Manager attributes future growth of these products to the "anticipated demand for passive storm protection by builders and homeowners." The success in Milestone sales can be directly attributed to the overall value resulting from the company's manufacturing integration and commitment to quality.

For more information, please visit www.floridaextruders.com.

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Pub. No. 2459942