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Parade of Homes: Quality shines even as quantity declines

By James Heffernan -- jheffernan@nvdaily.com

WINCHESTER -- In the midst of a tough year for the housing industry, area builders came together Thursday morning to celebrate some of their handiwork and to outline their legislative agenda.

"Housing prices are at historic lows, and the quality of our award-winning builders can't be beat," said Christian Schweiger, executive vice president of the Top of Virginia Builders Association.

The group's 17th annual Parade of Homes, which is going on this weekend, is a leaner affair than in years past -- a reflection, Schweiger says, of the local market.

Four of the five homes featured on this year's tours, along with their winning builders, were announced Thursday.

Kee Construction Services placed first in the Estate division for its work on the "Belleville," a gabled, 5,000-square-foot home perched on a circular driveway at 121 Belleville Court in Winchester.

In many ways, the property is a reflection of the broader market. A partially-built home that fell victim to foreclosure and was purchased by developer Dave Holliday, it sat on the market for about a year. Kee Construction was brought in to complete the job.

"There were a lot of challenges," said Tim McKee, the company's electrical manager.

The finished \$900,000 home features four bedrooms, two bonus rooms, an oversized stone fireplace and a circular staircase. The property is now under contract, McKee said.

Other Parade of Homes winners are White Signature Homes for the "Executive," at 122 Lake Holiday Road in Cross Junction (Division I); and Interactive Builders for the "Ridgefield," at 401 Castlman Drive in Winchester (Division II) and the "Oakwood," at 181 Hammock Lane in Winchester (Division III).

The Belleville also took home the Realtors Choice award from the Blue Ridge Association of Realtors.

A fifth home featured on the tour is the 3,500-square-foot "Mayfield" at 330 Crispin Trail in Frederick County.



The "Belleville," a 5,000-square-foot home at 121 Belleville Court in Winchester, is one of the homes featured in the 17th annual Parade of Homes this weekend. Dennis Grundman/Daily



A circular staircase. Dennis Grundman/Daily



An oversized stone fireplace. Dennis Grundman/Daily

With the exception of the "Executive," the homes will be open to the public today and Sunday from noon to 5 p.m.

Also at Thursday's meeting, John Conrad, chairman of the TVBA's governmental affairs committee, told members that the building industry is working to establish a more equitable proffer system that doesn't overburden the builder, and will continue to fight a fire-code change that would require sprinkler systems in new homes.

Builders can also expect fees to go up in each of the counties they work in due to new storm water management regulations from the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, Conrad said.

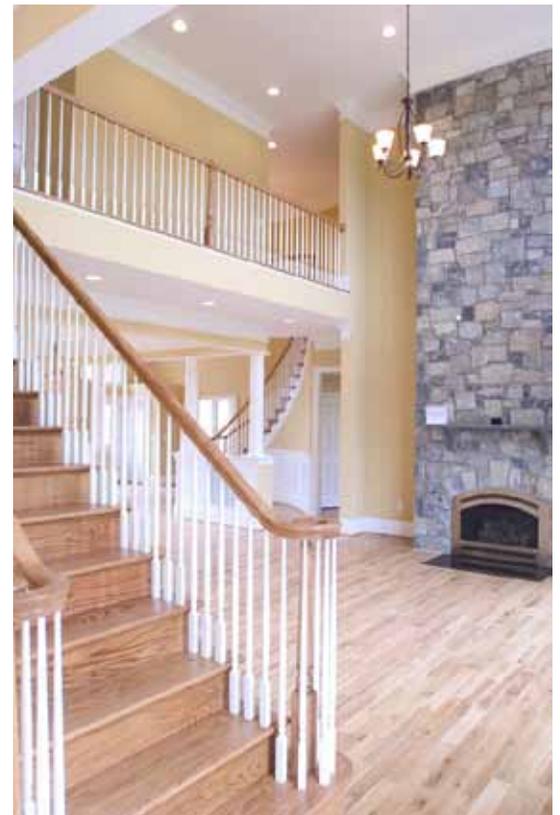
Dale White, owner of White Signature Homes and president of the Top of Virginia Builders Association, said appraisers need to stop using foreclosed properties in an area as comparables to new construction. The decision drives down the value of the new home, he said.

He also said Congress needs to increase the home-buyer tax credit and extend it to everyone, not just first-time purchasers. The program should carry over into next year to continue to help the local economy, he added.

"In this country, if you don't build homes, nobody has a job," White said.



*The kitchen island.
Dennis Grundman/Daily*



*The staircase, fireplace and rooms.
Dennis Grundman/Daily*