

# Auburn Pointe: Green, transit-oriented development

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*By Kenneth S. Chestnut, IBG Construction Services*

Just east of Atlanta's Grady Memorial Hospital, something remarkable is taking place. Auburn Pointe, a mixed-income community is rapidly being built. In a recession that has stalled most major construction, just the fact that work is ongoing at Auburn Pointe is part of what's remarkable. But even more remarkable is the vast array of energy- and resource-efficient "green" technologies that are Auburn Pointe's hallmark.

That green construction is part of a movement that's good for business, good for consumers and good for Georgia's economy. Global Green USA recently issued a report citing Georgia as the No. 1 state (tied with Connecticut) in achieving green building ratings in the construction of housing financed using the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits program.

In 2007, IBG Construction Services saw a silver lining in the storm clouds of the coming recession. Developers that had the wherewithal to weather the downturn were demanding from construction companies that they demonstrate a greater emphasis on sustainable building practices – notably in multifamily affordable housing, an area where IBG has considerable experience. Last year, we sponsored two in-house seminars for our executives, development partners, architects and others, which were conducted by Southface, an Atlanta non-profit that for three decades has been encouraging sustainable development. Our training emphasized solar and other forms of renewable energy, water use, and energy- and resource-efficient design.

In short, we made a decision to become a pioneer in "green" building practices for three reasons:

- We saw it as an advantage we could offer developers.
- Communities increasingly are concerned about sustainable construction, and often are willing to provide incentives for such building practices.
- Consumers – whether residential, commercial or retail tenants, as well as home buyers, want more energy and resource efficiency. Part of their motivation is being responsible citizens, and they anticipate equivalent responsibility from the development and construction industries. Consumers also are motivated by pocketbook concerns – they want the economic benefit that energy efficiency can bring.

In Southface's Summer 2010 Southface Journal, an article underscored the importance to modest income families of green construction. "In times like these, paying the monthly utility bill and filling up the gas tank often impose a financial hardship on low-income families," the Journal reported. Energy efficient certified construction "ensures a minimum energy savings of 15 percent over code ... money they can then use for other necessities." The Journal's article also noted that green buildings – like those IBG is building at Auburn Pointe – are typically located near transit, reducing families' transportation costs. And, the Journal stated, green affordable housing developments "help provide a healthy indoor and outdoor environment for residents by reducing exposure to pollutants."

There's another aspect of green construction that should motivate all of us to pay attention in these lean economic times. Energy inefficient buildings don't just "waste energy." They take money out of

consumers' pockets. That's money drained from the economy, money that could be used to start and maintain businesses, or patronize the existing businesses in the community.

At IBG, all of our project management team members are either accredited or preparing for the accreditation exam by the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED program. All completed projects since 2007 have been Energy Star rated, and all current projects are designed to win either LEED certification or a similar designation called EarthCraft, the environmentally sensitive construction program of the Greater Atlanta Home Builders Association.

What does that mean in practical terms? At Auburn Pointe's latest phase, the 154-unit multifamily phase, known as Ashley Auburn Pointe, all buildings conform to EarthCraft specifications. A 10 kilowatt solar energy system, and geothermal climate control vastly reduce reliance on the power company – and the power company's bill is reduced, an efficiency that will be passed on to residents. The management and leasing office is LEED certified – reflecting details such as sealing all seams in the building. The community's swimming pool will not use fresh water, which a recent drought has taught Georgia to conserve. Instead, the pool will be filled with salt water – considered healthier because chemicals aren't added.

Here's another way of looking at just one of those features: geo-thermal heating and cooling. First, geo-thermal is much more efficient than other heating and cooling systems. The process uses the constant temperature underground to provide heating, cooling and hot water. With the geo-thermal systems already installed around the nation, 3 million tons of carbon dioxide pollution are eliminated annually – the equivalent of taking 650,000 cars off the road. That's a number to which we're proud to contribute.

IBG's green commitment at Ashley Auburn Pointe includes:

- The reuse and recycling of building materials to reduce the use of natural resources such as timber, minerals & non-renewal resources;
- Recycling construction waste to minimize what goes to the landfill;
- Reduction of water use by installing efficient plumbing fixtures;
- Properly built, insulated and weatherproofed buildings, thereby minimizing future expensive maintenance and increasing the longevity of building materials; and
- Increased insulation and air sealing, combined with energy efficient systems, to lower the energy usage and the resident energy costs.

Ultimately, all of America's construction industry will have to become green. Laws, codes, consumers and economics assure that. But the expertise already exists – at IBG and similar construction companies that understand their responsibility to clients, consumers and the community.

*Kenneth S. Chestnut is president and CEO of Atlanta-based IBG Construction Services LLC. IBG's current and past clients and partnerships include the Atlanta Housing Authority, The Integral Group LLC, City of Atlanta, Columbia Residential and the Columbus Housing Authority, the Georgia Department of Transportation, Georgia State Financing and Investment Commission, Coca-Cola, Atlanta Public Schools, Morehouse College, and the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games.*

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