

# Taking a Stand for Sustainability

*LifeStyle Homes pushed the envelope in its quest for Net-Zero energy homes, bringing a one-of-a-kind neighborhood to the master plan of Viera.*

By LAUREN FELECHNER

Photography By CATHY HEINZ PHOTOGRAPHY





**P**ublic interest in a completed residential development can often be determined as the make-it-or-break-it standard for the project and its team. However, not all inconsistencies or unexpected occurrences can be seen as problematic. LifeStyle Homes' biggest worry during the construction process of its Net-Zero energy, single-family community of Levanto, located within the master plan of Viera in Melbourne, Fla., was the unexpected — but welcomed — response and interest from the public. Jake Luhn, CEO, LifeStyle Homes Builders, Inc., explained that stability was present during the building process, however, "The only change from plan that we experienced in Levanto is that sales occurred faster than we had anticipated. We are convinced the twin quality factors of Viera and LifeStyle Homes made that possible."

The Viera Company, who is the developer behind Levanto and privately funded the community, helped bring the project to its level of success today by pushing through the economic trouble of the market's downturn, and generating a bright light in the master plan with its partnership with LifeStyle Homes and implementing the company within Viera. "As the market began to

improve, we sought out and added builders such as Lifestyle who brought their Net-Zero home to the community and energized sales by offering a product that appealed to a segment of the market that we were not reaching," explained Scott Miller, vice president of Residential and Community Development, The Viera Company. He continued, "Today's buyers expect innovation and value in their new home and we have been able to assemble a very good mix of those traits with our builders in Levanto."

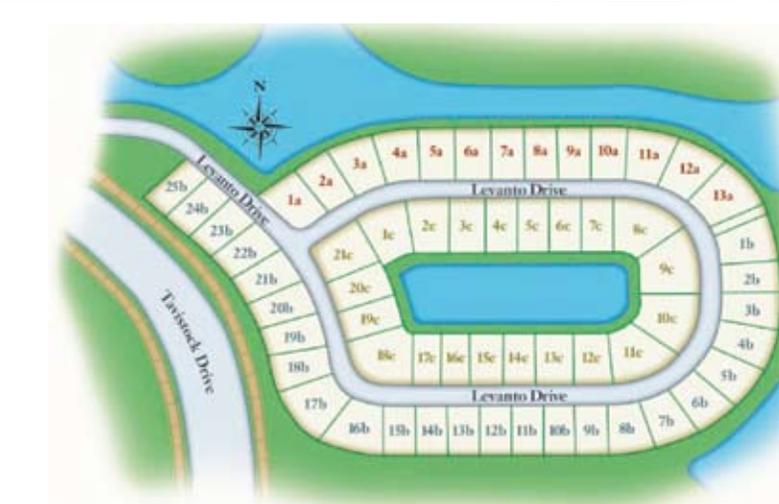
Consisting of 59 lots, Levanto has obtained contracts on every one and has sold over 40 in the last 12 months. With the combination of the stringent architectural standards upheld by Viera town officials and the unprecedented level of energy-efficiency that Levanto achieved, truly showcases the dedication and superiority that LifeStyle Homes wanted to implement within Viera's master plan. "The fact that we could deliver technologically-superior homes that fulfilled their design aspirations made sense to us both," Luhn stated. He continued, "We felt our guaranteed HERS 60 LifeStyle SunSmart energy-efficient homes and our truly remarkable Net-Zero energy LifeStyle SunSmartPV homes fit the bill perfectly."

Twenty years after its initial conception,

the master plan of Viera now entails 20,000 acres; over 20,000 residents; 244 employers offering 8,500 jobs; A-rated schools; a new hospital; 13 places of worship; shopping center; golf courses; recreational trails and parks; and is the location of the county school board, courthouse and government services, according to Miller. This expansive community only continued to thrive and grow over the past two decades that encompassed questionable — and sometimes threatening — economic times. The inclusion of Levanto in Viera came from the need for a replacement community to fulfill an 85-foot-wide lot and a 75-foot-wide lot community.

According to Miller, The Viera Company wanted and allowed for more creative designs to encourage and achieve such resident features as side-entry garages, and these homes often took a build-out time of 135 days. "Throughout the downturn, industry experts have predicted that master-planned communities [like Viera] would lead the recovery, and we have found that to be absolutely true with homebuyers choosing to buy a new home in a master-planned community as they feel more confident in the

▲ *Reaching HERS 60 performance calls for using solar-powered hot water systems, added insulation and tighter construction standards, among other items.*



▲ The first Net-Zero home, which was started as a feasibility test, sold at list price before it was completed.

◀ Levanto is part of the 20,000-acre, master-planned community of Viera, which started planning in the 1980s.

future of their investment,” Miller said.

The decision by LifeStyle Homes to pursue building the Net-Zero energy neighborhood came with the deepening of the Great Recession in 2008. LifeStyle realized that they would ultimately begin competing with themselves for new sales with distressed re-sales of homes they built several years ago that were back on the market at heavily discounted prices. “It is one thing to tout

your homes compared with homes built by a competitor. It is truly awkward to sell against your own homes,” Luhn stated. In order to avoid this competition, LifeStyle Homes was directed to pursue building homes that were energy-efficient, but

ones that remained cost-neutral to their clients as the homes they built before. The cost-neutral homes targeted a HERS 60 rating under the guidelines of the Department of Energy (DOE) Builders Challenge program, combined with the proper equipment and construction upgrades. The HERS 60 homes were branded as LifeStyle SunSmart Homes, and the SunSmart package soon became a LifeStyle Homes standard. “We would no

longer offer LifeStyle homes without the SunSmart package included in the price,” Luhn said. With this brand’s success, LifeStyle decided to take their HERS 60 homes one step further and master Net-Zero energy, resulting in their HERS 0-rated homes, creating the LifeStyle’s SunSmartPV line of homes. Luhn explained, “The starting point for any LifeStyle SunSmartPV Net-Zero energy home is a LifeStyle SunSmart guaranteed HERS 60 home.”

Since the HERS 60 home already implements solar-powered hot water systems, added insulation and tighter construction standards, LifeStyle used this platform in order to achieve a HERS 0 home by adding a roof-mounted photovoltaic array to convert the free power of the sun into free electricity for homeowners — for life — by utilizing the latest micro-inverter PV technology for added safety and efficiency. According to Miller, natural



### **Project Team**

**Architect:** Larry Hufford  
**Builder:** LifeStyle Homes Builders, Inc.  
**Developer:** The Viera Company

▲ *The starting point for any LifeStyle SunSmartPV Net-Zero energy home is a LifeStyle SunSmart guaranteed HERS 60 home.*

◀ *Levanto is a forward-thinking community with its LifeStyle SunSmart and LifeStyle SunSmartPV energy-efficient homes.*

gas and reclaimed water for irrigation has also been integrated into the Levanto community.

Levanto's timeless aesthetics and innovative abilities is the first of its kind within Viera. LifeStyle Homes does not believe that eco-conscious and efficient homes need to look different in order to showcase

their superiority as a green residence. The company decided to not sacrifice attractive exterior and interiors, but rather combine them with functional, cost-effective features that create a brag-worthy, aesthetically-

pleasing home that boasts a mindful approach to living. "The fact that they also delivered unprecedented energy-efficiency was icing on the cake for us," Luhn stated. "Doing the right thing has always been the guiding principle at LifeStyle Homes," Luhn explained. Built based upon the values of the Duda family — who purchased the land in the 1940s where Viera stands today — plays a role in LifeStyle's aggressive approach to benefitting the environment, overlapping guidelines and promoting healthy living for residents. "Levanto deserved to have outstanding homes, representing excellence in design and quality," Luhn said.



**Lauren Felechner** is the features editor of *Green Home Builder*. She may be contacted at [lfelechner@penpubinc.com](mailto:lfelechner@penpubinc.com)