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City

AT THE
BY STEVE HULLIBARGER

Mills of Carthage

A Brownfield Springs to Life

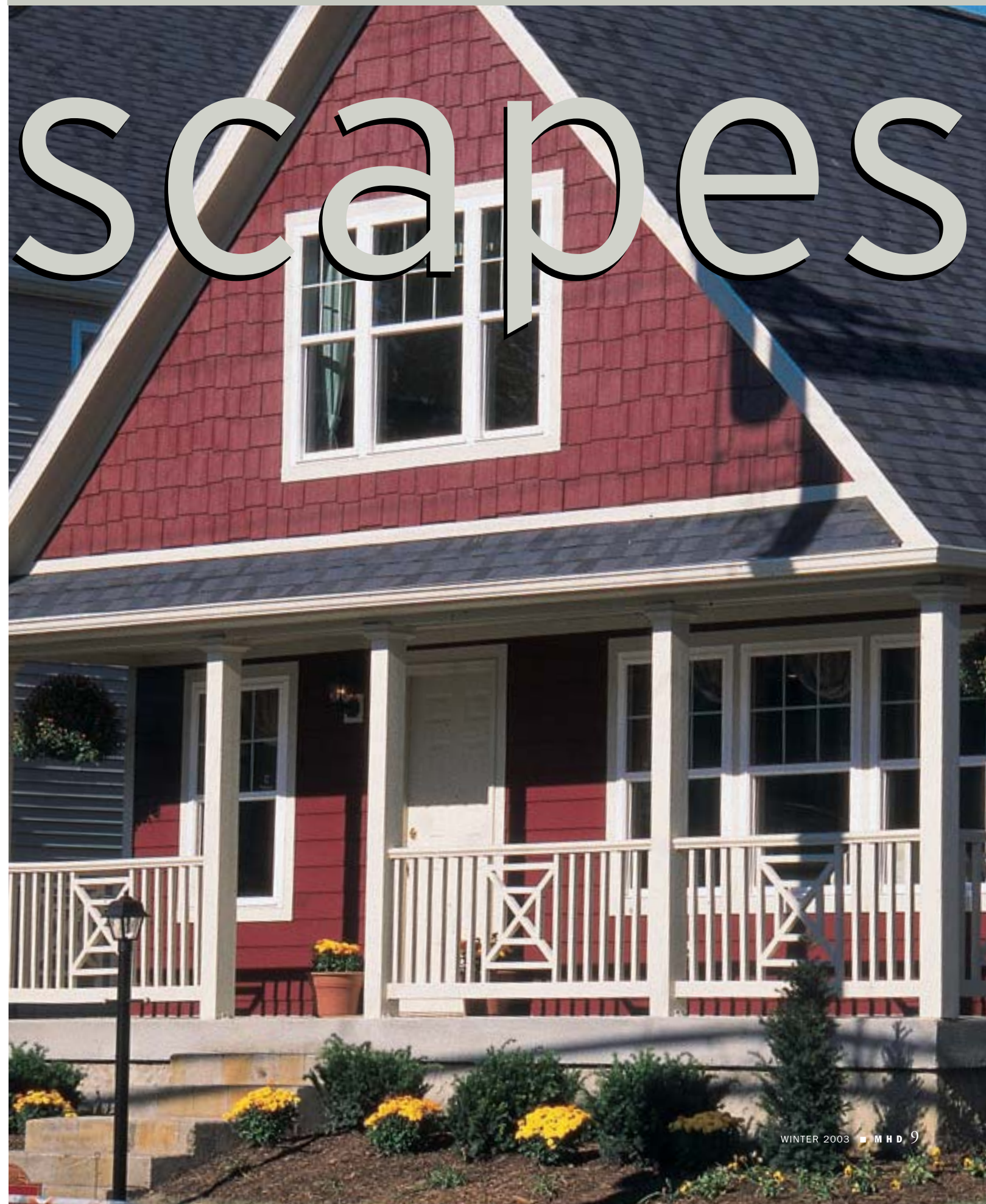


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he midwest now has its own showcase of modern, urban-compatible manufactured homes that truly demonstrate just how flexible these designs can be. Following in the tradition of other risk-taking and innovative developers before them, the developers of the Cityscapes at the Mills of Carthage showed their stuff in Cincinnati in the closing weeks of October. In conjunction with a joint seminar of the Manufactured Housing Institute (MHI) and the Automated Builders Consortium (ABC), nine HUD-Code manufactured homes and six modular homes were on display for builders, developers, and the general public. Adding to the impact of the display was an open house held for elected offi-

scapes





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cials and their staffs from all over the country. The best measure of success for the project, however, was the enthusiastic public response, most notably from residents in the neighborhood.

The public, it seems, never has embraced innovation and advancement in

housing construction methods with the same zeal it gives to new concepts in, for example, computer or automotive technology. Tradition is paramount in housing, even if it means that the cost to build homes the old fashion way is running away from people's ability to pay it. The

manufactured home has proven its ability to deliver more per dollar to homebuyers, but it has been a hard sell due to some misperceptions that have burdened it.

Long ago it was found that the only way to influence public policy makers and their activist constituents, was to prove that the homes could actually be permanently placed within city locations and converted from personal property housing products to real estate. Although complex undertakings with no less difficulty than developing actual subdivisions, entrepreneurs of the past paved the way for other demonstrations, each of which has helped shape public opinions about the manufactured home and, in time, has helped roll back cumbersome and unfair regulatory barriers.

The Beginning

Cincinnati-based developer and MHI National Chairman Dan Rolfes expressed his ambition to convincingly show the people of Cincinnati and the surrounding area that manufactured housing needs to be considered only as an alternative *process* for building homes rather than a *product*. Throughout 2000 and 2001, Rolfes, owner of Holiday Homes Inc., continued to bring the concept to his peers in quarterly meetings of the MHI Site Development Committee. His persistence and vision resulted in a plan to bring the 2002 MHI Developing with Manufactured Homes Seminar to Cincinnati, with the idea that the seminar would also focus on a development he would create.

Rolfes had his eye on a brownfield property in the Carthage neighborhood, about 10 miles north of downtown Cincinnati. This land had been the site of a carpet and linoleum mill that had been abandoned for years. He calculated the 13.5 acres would yield about 50 lots, each about 6,000 square



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feet. The City of Cincinnati was enthused by Rolfe's ambitions, and sold the property to his new company, Potterhill Homes, headed by Carolyn Rolfe, his enterprising daughter. To further encourage homeownership efforts, the city agreed to waive property taxes for each homebuyer on the improvements segment of their tax bill, not land, for a period of 15 years.

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Selectivity Governs Home Designs

Regional manufacturers were then approached with the idea of participating in the project. They responded by submitting proposals to a city architectural review committee, which included Potterhill, city, industry and neighborhood representatives. An emphasis was placed on

traditional neighborhood design, since the existing homes in Carthage have common architectural styling.

In the target area of Carthage, single-family homes were built in the first third of the 20th century. Farmhouse and Craftsman style architecture is the most prevalent, with other period styles represented as well. Lots in the area are only 30 feet in width and 100 to 165 feet in depth. Garages, if any, are located in the rear yard, accessible by a driveway that extends alongside the house. No alleys serve the area.

In order to meet their goals, Potterhill set the following minimum criteria for the homes:

- Minimum 5/12 roof pitch
- Energy Star Rating on some of the models
- Hardie Panel siding (cement lap siding) on some models
- Front Porches on all models
- Craftsman, Victorian, American 4-square, Bungalow or Farmhouse Style
- Variety of ranch-style and 2 story homes
- Minimum 8' flat ceilings on first floors
- 9' flat ceilings on first floors on some models

Manufacturers that met the test and built homes for the subdivision were The Commodore Corporation, Redman Homes, Patriot Homes, New Era Building Systems, Genesis Homes, and Schult Homes.

The newly-platted lots at the Mills of Carthage are larger than others in the area. Each lot measures 40 feet in width by 145 feet in depth. Rolfe created alleys to serve the lots and therefore the garages are situated in the rear yard, opening to the alley.

There are clear design identifications among the models. The Farmhouse architectural style can easily be recognized in the Eames model. The Ford, Touchstone,



A view of the original site with the factory. Tests and remediation efforts were conducted in order to ensure the land was safe for development.



A picture of the existing neighborhood. Notice the architectural style, which the developer and manufacturers matched with the newly built homes.

At a fraction of the budget that national builders have at their disposal, Potterhill Homes carried off a masterpiece of planning, showing others how product presentation can be so critical to public acceptance of new technologies in housing.

Stickley and Gatsby reflect touches of Craftsman architecture.

When walking the sidewalks one can see how well these 21st century homes match and complement the older neighborhood.

“The Mills of Carthage development has been such a great boost for the city of Cincinnati because we’re looking for ways to put people in affordable homes and this does it,” stated Cincinnati Mayor Charlie Luken. “It just works perfectly with this neighborhood and for Cincinnati. This has brought great energy to the entire city. It has lifted everybody to start thinking about the opportunities that exist in our city. And I’m sure that other cities will look at this development and recognize what a great opportunity this type of development represents.”

First Class Marketing

This development represents perhaps the best effort this industry has made to close the gap with site-builder marketing skills. At a fraction of the budget that national builders have at their disposal, Potterhill Homes carried off a masterpiece of planning, showing others how product presentation can be so critical to public acceptance of new technologies in housing.

“The homes here in the Mills of Carthage development represent the leading edge of technological innovations in the manufactured housing industry” stated Bill Matchneer, administrator of the Manufactured Housing Program at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Affairs, the regulatory agency overseeing the manufactured housing industry. “The chance to get out here and see these homes actually sited and open to the public, it’s incredible. There’s just so much ‘wow’ value to the quality of these homes.”

Similarly, homebuyer response has exceeded Rolfes’ expectations, with sales pending on 11 of the 15 models by the end of the seminar-exhibition week, according to Cincinnati’s major newspaper, the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. With such a

favorable reaction by the market, Rolfes is moving rapidly to develop the rest of the lots at the site. The prices for the display models, range from \$137,300 to \$187,200.

Thanks to the efforts of Dan and Carolyn Rolfes and their team, the Mills of Carthage will become a landmark development for interested persons to judge the viability of manufactured and modern housing as a better method—or process—of home construction. As it fills and matures, it will take its place alongside other well-known and pioneering communities that give choices and better values for people looking for a home of their own.

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