

Tiny

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isn't enough supply and there's a big financial hump for everybody. If we can add supply at an affordable rate, I feel we'll do all right."

Smaller, affordable homes are a niche the current housing market isn't filling, said Megan McDonald, a senior planner with Tompkins County.

McDonald said family sizes have remained low in the county — 2.8 people per household — and have decreased slightly since 2009, creating a demand for smaller homes. The recently released Danter Study found the demand for condominiums had its highest potential for growth existed for properties priced less than \$250,000.

Tiny Timbers has an advantage, McDonald said, because most developers don't build at that price point because the profit margins on the less-expensive units aren't as lucrative.

Dolph is able to produce homes that cost between \$100,000 and \$200,000, including labor, because he and local architect Noah Demarest have developed floor plans for a set of homes that are based off a 15-foot by 15-foot timber-frame block Dolph can prefabricate in his workshop.

Hobby to business

Buzz Dolph was having a hard time retiring, said his son, Caleb Dolph. The former stone setter and landscaper started building as a hobby, constructing a compound of eclectic structures around his Quarry Road workshop, across the road from the Llenroc quarry his family had owned for years.

Buzz Dolph and his wife had a vacation rental business already with Stone Quarry House, located on the same property. As he started working on carpentry projects during his downtime to relieve the stress of city worksites and project managers, he found a passion, Caleb Dolph said.

It all began with four tiny, timber-frame houses on the Quarry Road property. Buzz Dolph saw them as a way to entertain himself in retirement and bring in some additional money to supplement the rental in-



Buzz Dolph, owner of Tiny Timbers LLC, outside a home built by the company.

come. At some point during that project, he wondered: What if you could prefabricate the 15-by-15 block and draw up several floor plans building off of that in three-foot increments? Building each component in a workshop, he thought he could feasibly produce fully insulated houses that could be assembled in just over a month for costs well below the average price of a new home, making new home ownership accessible to a bracket who otherwise would be unable to afford it.

He went to Noah Demarest, and the pair worked together on a set of floor plans for homes from 525 square feet to 1150 square feet, all based around that cube. The plans each contain a kitchen, living room, bathroom and loft bedroom.

Tiny Timbers kits are easy to transport — the walls come ready for sheetrocking, with structurally insulated panels taking the place of traditional, unwieldy fiber insulation in the walls and roof — and assembly, with the pieces already set to finish. From basement to finished house takes about five weeks, Buzz Dolph said. It's not a new concept: Washington-based company, Fab Cab has been in the modular timberframe business nearly a decade.

But the Ithaca-area

housing market gives him an opening to make this work locally.

McDonald said Ithaca, unlike other cities in the region, has little vacant housing stock to renovate into the types of homes people seek and, in the coming years, solutions like Dolph's may become more prevalent in solving the housing stock equation that has created ripple effects in the rental market by forcing prospective homeowners to rent, rather than buy.

One challenge? Tiny houses don't work everywhere, and finding parcels to build where the pocket developments like the one in Varna meet zoning laws, including setback and lot-size regulations, can be difficult.

Varna has design guidelines and zoning for infill development in the hamlet, which Demarest helped adapt the development to. Even with the legal issues sorted, Dolph had to create a project neighbors were on board with.

"I've become very disenchanted with the construction situation in this town," Dolph said. "Nobody tries to build for anyone who wants to live here long-term. People commute to Ithaca to work. It's BS. And developers are getting seriously rich. I feel they're overbuilding for the wrong people."

Beyond Varna

Dolph says the Tiny Timbers homes are still in

the research and development phase. He has a handful of prototypes on his property and several projects lined up around the county lined up. He'll use those to perfect his process for the modular kits, now on the third prototype. Next up after Varna is another pocket neighborhood, also with Demarest, on Campbell Avenue in the city.

He's dreaming bigger than Ithaca or Tompkins County, though. Dolph said once he's built about 60 homes in the area, he'd like to expand the business to the national level by assembling the basic components on his property and licensing the methods and materials to a network of contractors around the country.

At home, meanwhile, he thinks he can make a major change in how home ownership is perceived in an area where rentals are king and ownership is only a dream for many. McDonald agrees change is coming to the Ithaca housing market. "We're going to see some changes, whether we decide not to build anything — which means more traffic and more employers shipping in their workforce — or because we're agreeing to build new housing," McDonald said. "You can either change by choice or let change happen but either way, it's going to happen."

Follow Nick Reynolds on Twitter @IJCityWatch

S-VE

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Local PSA's

On the subject of Haefele's Channel 4 public service announcements, if you don't get cable, you can still see the PSA's on your computer. Haefele TV runs all the PSA's on their website, www.htva.net. At the top is a menu ribbon. Far right it says 'local ads' — click on that, choose Spencer ads on the left, and there they are — you can scroll through them as quickly as you want by using the arrow buttons at the bottom.

Meet Chris Ford

New York State Assemblyman Chris Friend, who represents Spencer, Candor, Waverly and Owego, will have a meeting at the Spencer Town Hall, Tuesday, Oct. 4, at 7 p.m. to meet his constituents and answer questions. Unfortunately, Van Etten is not in his district, but that is par for the course — the invisible glass wall rises again between our two towns. The public is welcome to attend this meeting and meet their representative.

Blood drive

There will be an American Red Cross blood donation drive on Saturday, Oct. 1, 7:30 to 11:30 a.m., at the Village of Van Etten Community Center, 6 Gee Street, across from the Dandy. To schedule an appointment, call Pamela at 589-7970 or email her at plr2@cornell.edu. Volunteers are also needed to help work the drive or part of it.

Ladies Auxiliary

The Van Etten Fire Department Ladies Auxiliary will have a Chinese Auction on Saturday, Oct. 1, at the fire station. Doors open at 5 p.m., auction starts at 7 p.m. Think early Christmas presents! Come for supper, too! Burgers, hot dogs, French fries, and beverages will be available for sale.

Beef in a Box

I bought a ticket for the Spencer Masons' Beef in a Box raffle. For \$20, you get a chance to win 200 pounds of locally-raised, grass-fed Angus beef that comes in its own seven-cubic foot chest freezer. Only 200 tickets will be sold and they are moving well. Winners will be drawn as soon as all the tickets are sold. Email Rob at RKM56@cornell.edu to

get one, if you don't know any Masons.

I am partial to the Masons because they have been so supportive of two youth organizations that I have been very active in — Pack 17 and the SVE Soccer Club. For many years the Spencer Lodge has been the sponsor for cub and boy scouts, provided meeting space, storage space and other practical helps (including leaders!) They have let the Soccer Club put a small field on their lawn, when space is short, and let the annual SVE Soccer Camp use the Lodge dining room for lunch and thunderstorm protection during camp.

Drug disposal

Here is another notice in advance, so you can get ready — the Chemung County Sheriff's Office will take part in the Drug Enforcement Administration's Nationwide prescription Drug "Take Back" Initiative on Saturday, Oct. 22, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Chemung County residents are encouraged to turn in their expired and unused prescription medications for proper disposal. Residents are asked to keep the medications in their original container with the label intact; however, they may blacken out their name.

All medications, ointments and sprays are accepted but they will not take needles. Residents can drop off their medications at the following locations with no questions asked: Southport Volunteer Fire Department 1001 Carl St., Elmira, New York 14904 or West Elmira Fire Department 1299 W. Water St., Elmira, New York 14905. For more information, see www.chemungsheriff.net or www.dea.gov.

Vote!

Today is National Voter Registration Day. County Boards of Election will have extended local registration hours, per New York State Election Law. In Tioga County, the Board of Elections is now located on Rt. 38 in the same complex as the Social Services/Mental Health Departments.

RIP Joe

My sympathy goes out to the family of Joe Nordlander of Van Etten, who died last Wednesday. Joe delivered my fuel oil for years. I'll miss him.

Spencer-Van Etten Town Talk appears every Tuesday. Submit items to Sally Marx at P.O. Box 723, Spencer, NY 14883, 589-6311, or SMarx25@htva.net

Cuomo

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whether it will return the COR and Ciminelli contributions.

In Buffalo on Friday, Cuomo said the complaint "spelled out a very disturbing and reprehensible story of possible misdeeds." He said he was unaware of any of the conduct alleged in the charges.

"We have to be clear and speak with one voice that any wrongdoing in state government will be punished severely," he said.

The complaint from Bharara's office says Howe encouraged the companies to contribute to Cuomo's campaign.

At one point during a slow period in the political season, Howe advised them via email to hold off on contributing to state and federal candidates to "make sure you can (get) the most leverage out of them."

Howe advised Aiello and Gerardi to contribute to Cuomo "in higher amounts so that the Governor's Office would know and remember them," according to Penland's sworn complaint.

At various points, Percoco, who was Cuomo's campaign manager in 2010 and 2014, sought contributions from the companies through Howe. In addition to the \$100,000 from LPCiminelli and its associates, Ciminelli hosted a fundraising dinner that raised Cuomo's campaign \$250,000.

On Thursday, Bharara said the contributions provided "context" to the developers' motivations. But he said the "crux" of the criminal charges are focused on payments directly to Howe and Percoco, not political donations.

Prior to its spending boost in 2011, COR and its top executive contributed \$49,000 total to gubernatorial candidates, including \$10,000 to Cuomo, according to the complaint.

"It provides some background on the motivations on the part of the folks who were paying bribes, showing that they wanted to curry favor," Bharara said.

An attorney for Aiello and Gerardi have attacked Howe's credibility, calling him a "self-admitted fraudster, tax cheat and liar who faces an incalculable number of years in prison." Howe is cooperating with Bhar-

ara's office.

"Is there any question that (Howe) would do or say anything to reduce his sentence?" the attorney, Steve Coffey, said in a statement. "I have absolutely no doubt of Steve's and Joe's full innocence."

Blair Horner, legislative director for the New York Public Interest Research Group, said Cuomo should return the contributions if an eventual trial shows they were tied to the alleged scheme.

He said Cuomo and the Legislature should revisit proposals to ban or limit political contributions from entities with business before the state.

"Right now, all we have are allegations," Horner said. "The governor's not running for two more years. Let's see how it plays out. If they were tied in to the conspiracy, then the governor should give the money back."

Frank Ciminelli, president of LPCiminelli, issued a statement Thursday saying the company is confident its officials "acted appropriately and legally."

"When given the opportunity to fully respond to these charges, we are confident everyone will be vindicated," he said.





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