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Meritage tries out a new wall system

By **Arselia Gales**

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Scottsdale-based Meritage Homes has teamed up with local wall-building company HercuWall to offer what it believes is a more cost-effective, energy-efficient wall system.

In a pilot project in Goodyear, Meritage homes are being built with HercuWalls, which are insulated concrete panels that replace traditional framing, drywall and insulation. The wall system, with a concrete and steel structure, is 7 inches thick and pre-insulated with polystyrene.

The wall-construction method creates houses that are more airtight, water-resistant and durable, Meritage officials said. The panels do not mold and are effective at keeping out pests, such as termites and rodents, they added.

"As these homes are resold, they will hopefully draw a higher value than a conventionally built home because of all the added benefits," said Michael Niemann, founder and CEO of Tempe-based HercuWall.

"Our objective is to create an opportunity for people to live better and have a higher quality of life," said C.R. Herro, vice president of environmental affairs at Meritage Homes.

Herro said the walls trim energy bills by at least 50 percent, and temperature variation from room to room is reduced.

Construction time for a

home built with HercuWalls will be slightly faster than at a typical Meritage-built home. The windows and walls will go up faster because they are pre-insulated, company officials said.

The first two houses the company is constructing with HercuWalls are located in Meritage Homes' Del Rio community in Goodyear. Both houses are expected to go on the market in May, priced at approximately \$89 per square foot. The average home size in the Del Rio community is between 2,200 and 3,200 square feet.

Meritage Homes plans to build six houses in the Goodyear Del Rio community using the new wall material.

Other Meritage houses in Goodyear are priced from \$93 to \$108 per square foot.

"We're really excited about these homes," said Steve Hilton, Meritage Homes chairman and CEO. "These homes that we're building with the HercuWall technology are potentially revolutionary for the industry. As we continue to prototype these homes and work through some of the issues, we expect you could see walls like this in every home we build."

Herro said, "This is something we look to advance the entire homebuilding industry throughout the world. Once you can do something that is so much better for the same cost, it's tough to justify building the old way."