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**PROFESSIONAL-GRADE** kitchens are still popular among homebuyers, despite the tough market and the talks of a recession.

# Luxury options

Despite tough times, some buyers still want the best of the best for their home

BY SARAH OWEN  
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Steam showers, high-definition TVs, professional-grade kitchen gadgets and first-floor powder rooms are hot commodities nowadays.

Even as the housing market takes a dip and various federal officials say a recession is on the horizon (if not already here), Oshkosh homebuilders say some residents refuse to do without certain extras.

"Irregardless of the market, the recession and such, the trends still are the modern conveniences," said Billie Jo Mathusek, vice president of Gallery Homes LLC, which for the 10th year will showcase sites in the Winnebago Home Builders Association 2008 Parade of Homes, starting Friday. "We're seeing the wiring for all your surround-sound, high-def TVs - a lot of the technological things are not being cut out."

Those who are building or remodeling lately are realizing that value need not be sacrificed despite tough times. From incorporating "green" construction into early designs to purposefully placing key features, homeowners can get a bigger bang for their budget, builders say.

"People are putting money in places of bigger impact," Mathusek said.

That means allocating more of the home budget to rooms that serve for entertaining, like kitchens and living rooms, and going simpler in, say, upstairs bedrooms or spare bedrooms.



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**DETAILS LIKE** wrought-iron stairwells go over well with those in the home market.

Attending the parade this or next week would help potential homeowners brainstorm these and other ideas, says WHBA executive officer Mike Mathy.

"It's a sneak peek of what's going to be the latest and greatest products coming out, and they can see them firsthand and get an idea of what they'll look like in a real home," he said.

Builders will be on site, also, to talk about ways homeowners can most efficiently build a home from the get-go. One way being, to incorporate as many eco-friendly aspects as they might afford to save on heating and energy in the long run.

"Right from conception of the plan, we position the house in a way in which it captures as much sunlight as possible," Mathusek said. "Then, people are trying to cheat on

## AT A GLANCE

- ▶ **What:** 2008 Parade of Homes.
- ▶ **Where:** Around 20 sites in Winnebago County.
- ▶ **When:** Friday, 5 to 8 p.m.; Saturday and Sunday, noon to 5 p.m. Also Thursday, April 24, 5 to 8 p.m.; Friday, April 25, 5 to 8 p.m.; and Saturday, April 26 and Sunday, April 27, noon to 5 p.m.
- ▶ **Tickets:** \$10; \$5 children 5 to 17; \$8 for advance tickets.
- ▶ **More:** See a map, tour times and advance-ticket locations online at [www.whba.net](http://www.whba.net) or call (920) 235-2962.

## AT A GLANCE

With the housing market decline of late, local builders say there are ways to stretch your home budget.

- ▶ Consider other solid surfaces that carry sheen, such as new laminate countertop products, instead of expensive granite throughout a kitchen or bathroom.
- ▶ Design the home so it's positioned for best direct sunlight, to lessen heating costs.
- ▶ Don't be quick to pick highest-grade window, flooring and cabinetry options. "There are a lot of new products on the market that are less expensive, where it becomes more of the faux instead of the real," said Billie Jo Mathusek, vice president, Gallery Homes LLC.
- ▶ Optimize a design by incorporating most expensive features in main rooms where impact is greatest. "Places in which you entertain," Mathusek said.

things that aren't as critical, and still spend money on modern conveniences."

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