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## What Housing Downturn?

MIDDLEBURY, Vt., May 5 /PRNewswire/ -- In the midst of all the bad news regarding the state of residential housing and the economic woes of home builders, there is one home manufacturer that has more than held its own in the housing downturn. In fact, sales have increased 300% in the past year. The company is Connor Homes of Middlebury, Vermont. The company builds exquisite -- and affordable -- colonial reproduction "kit" homes that can be shipped anywhere in the world; and the world is beating a path to its door.

For one home manufacturer to attain triple-digit growth while the mainstream housing developers are issuing projections covered in red ink suggests the malaise of the housing industry may have causes beyond the collapse of the sub prime lending market alone. Michael Connor, founder and CEO of the company, believes the failure to provide an appealing housing stock to the buying public is partly to blame, noting that the predominant residential architectural style in America has devolved to a level derisively described as the "McMansion." Connor points out that the McMansion might be the only recognizable style in American architectural history that is so universally panned by architects and consumers alike.

By providing an alternative based on classical architectural forms, Connor Homes has tapped into a market niche that appears to have been a sleeping giant. Indeed, an entire movement known as the "New Old House Movement" has sprung up as a backlash to the lack of distinction of architectural design that permeates the American landscape today.

The company specializes in historically accurate homes that it manufactures in its state-of-the-art facility in Middlebury, Vermont. Connor's in-house designers work hand-in-hand with skilled craftsmen in the shop to create elegant, architecturally rich homes that look as though they have graced the landscape for generations. Each home is as individual as the homebuyer who will live in it. The home "packages" are then erected on-site by a builder selected by the homebuyer. This unique approach to buying a new home offers a pathway to quality building that is unavailable elsewhere, by methods the mainstream housing industry has largely ignored or demeaned as less authentic than on-site stick building.

While the company's design style is firmly rooted in the past, its

progressive attitude toward the advantages of off-site manufacturing extends to its approach to "Green' building which the company believes is a critical factor in its current success. The company eschews any structural building products that cannot last indefinitely with normal routine maintenance. Connor drives home the sustainability aspect of the company's building philosophy by stating that "If Monticello had been built with many of the structural products found in most of today's new homes, they would be selling tickets to an archeological dig, not a museum."

Connor believes that by combining modern manufacturing efficiencies and gracious, classically inspired architecture his company is redefining the way "new old" homes can and should be built in America today, and judging by the recent successes in the depressed housing economy, he may well be on to something.

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