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Photos by Amanda Stratford, FLORIDA TODAY

On the market. Avtec Homes' Gulfstream model is available starting at \$149,900, including the home site. The model is located on Emerson Drive in Palm Bay.

Avtec expanding its base

Local builder started company to cater to first-time homebuyers

BY ANNE STRAUB
FOR FLORIDA TODAY

When Avtec Homes started selling two years ago, sales people often had a hard time explaining the company's business plan to eager buyers.

Set up to cater to first-time buyers, the company often had to turn away buyers who already owned a home to stay true to its mission.

"They would get upset when we wouldn't sell to them," said Larry Sietsma, who started the company with his daughter, Sandi Forest.

Now, those homeowners can become Avtec customers, too.

Avtec's new model, the 2,092 square foot Gulfstream, is available to any buyer.

The original model, the Citation 3, remains dedicated to first-time buyers only.

Building on the original idea for its first model, the Gulfstream offers a limited number of upgrades. Keeping plans simple and consistent helps the company offer the home for \$149,900, including the home site, said Patti Wiltshire, new-home consultant.

Sietsma also used his reputation and contacts to strike deals with subcontractors and suppliers. A fifth-generation home builder, Sietsma started Holiday Builders and ran the company for 15 years before retiring.

Runaway home prices during the earlier years of this decade prompted him to start a new company dedicated to affordable homes.

The Gulfstream includes a

All about it

- **Builder:** Avtec Homes
- **New model:** The Gulfstream
- **Location:** 2105 Emerson Drive SE, Palm Bay
- **Home size:** 2,092 square feet under air conditioning
- **Price:** \$149,900, including home site in Palm Bay
- **Features:** Concrete block construction, 13 SEER air conditioner, built-in microwave, glass-top range, maple cabinets with 42-inch uppers, textured walls, large kitchen island, garden tub
- **For information:** Call 733-6014

two-car garage, indoor laundry, three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a dining room, an eat-in kitchen, family room, and what the company calls an "imagination room."

"What we didn't want to do was label it," Wiltshire said.

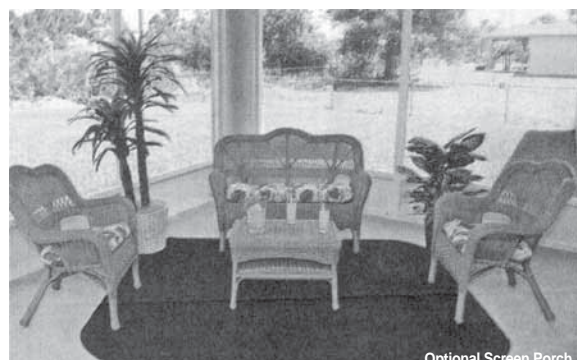
Set up in the model as an office, the room could be a game room, music room, exercise room, or whatever the owner imagines.

Sietsma, who designed the home, included a 5-by-8-foot kitchen island with storage underneath. The 6-by-11-foot pantry includes a window and is large enough to house a craft table.

"Larry tried to incorporate into the house everything that's important to people," Wiltshire said, noting the master bath includes dual sinks, a garden tub, separate shower and private commode.



Open spaces. The Gulfstream model's kitchen, above, includes a 5-by-8-foot island. Below, the patio is screened in and overlooks the backyard.



Optional Screen Porch

"People want a large, luxurious master bath. That's just where we've gone to," she said.

Avtec is building an average two homes every week, the company said, and pulled more permits in Palm Bay last year than any other builder.

Its first-time buyer model is located at 486 San Filippo Drive SE in Palm Bay. The Citation 3 covers 1,256 square feet under air conditioning and starts at \$114,900, including home site.

Financing programs including loans with no down payment are available on both models.

Forest generally attends closings and gets to celebrate with buyers, many of whom hadn't thought homeownership was possible for them.

"There are tears sometimes. That's what really makes it all worthwhile," she said.

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