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Wave of the future: Aurora's first fortified home

House designed to stand up to the elements

April 5, 2007

By ANDRE SALLES sun times news group

AURORA -- It will be able to withstand tornado force winds, earthquake tremors and hailstorms. It will stand up to flying debris, with a specially designed roof that will stay in place, even under the worst conditions.

And soon, it will stand on Benton Street, as the first fortified home in the city of Aurora.

Fortified homes are built to specifications set by the Institute for Business and Home Safety for added protection from weather elements. It involves building the walls from precast concrete, and adding protection to the windows and doors to increase resistance to natural disasters. In short, it redefines the phrase "safe house."

» Click to enlarge image



The Red Cross, with about 30 other organizations and the City of Aurora, is building the first fortified home in Aurora on Benton Street. A fortified house is made of pre-cast concrete and designed to stand up to tornadoes, hurricanes and hailstorms.

» Click to enlarge image



Markus Suggs, 3, of Sugar Grove, stares through a large hole created in a piece of siding Monday at the groundbreaking ceremony for Aurora's first fortified home at 825 Benton St. As a demonstration, participants fired a head of cabbage through a chunk of siding from a compressed air cannon to illustrate the effects of high speed winds on average home construction.

Photos by Marianne Mather / Staff photographer

In this case, the fortified home is a collaborative effort of Safe Home Illinois, a partnership of more than 20 organizations brought together by the American Red Cross. Representatives from all of those organizations made their way to Aurora's near east side Monday morning to watch as ground was broken, and walls were erected.

These walls, according to Brian Bock of Naperville's Dukane Precast, are made of two concrete panels, between 8 and 12 inches thick, held together with steel trusses and filled with environmentally friendly insulation. According to Dukane's Web site, they are the only company in the United States to offer walls like these.

It's not just the walls, of course. The windows, the doors, the very framework of the house will be strengthened by products and labor donated by numerous companies, including Simpson Strong-Tie, Andersen Windows and Doors, and the Portland Cement Association. Much of the construction work will be done by students at East Aurora, Waubonsie Valley and Neuqua Valley high schools, with professional and union support.

The land the home will be built on was donated to Joseph Corporation, an Aurora nonprofit company that works to refurbish homes and offers assistance to first-time homebuyers, by Jenetta Evans. Evans lives next door, in a neighborhood that Alderman Scheketa Hart-Burns said has had some problems, but is now

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What is a fortified home?

Fortified homes are built for added protection from the elements, to specifications set by the Institute for Business and Home Safety.

The walls are made of precast concrete and windows and doors are reinforced.

For more information on fortified homes, visit www.ibhs.org.

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According to Joseph Corporation's executive director Charles Huff, his company is looking for a low-income family to buy the house.

The new home will also be very energy-efficient, Huff said, and will save the new homeowners a bundle on heating costs and insurance.

This will be Illinois' second fortified home - a similar one was built in Bolingbrook in 2004.

For those questioning the need for a fortified home in the area, just think back to Saturday. A violent windstorm crashed through an apartment complex in Carol Stream late Saturday night, leaving 11 people injured and displacing more than 100.

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