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Contractor says rebuilding is easy as ABC Ex-New Yorker wants to build unique modular homes in Arcadia

By [Patrick Whittle](#)

ARCADIA -- Enzo Ardovini came to Arcadia as a volunteer and doesn't want to leave until he's made the city a better place to live.

Ardovini, a licensed general contractor in New York, moved to rural, hurricane-battered Arcadia in fall 2004 to help rebuild.

He saw an economically devastated city where Hurricane Charley destroyed swaths of vulnerable mobile homes and rickety old houses. DeSoto County's vast pastureland reminded him of where he was born, 40 miles south of Rome, Italy, and he decided to stay.

Ardovini is negotiating with city officials and a Tampa Bay manufacturer to open a unique modular home plant in the city. He wants to open the factory, which would turn out 1,000 homes per year, by the end of 2006.

The homes, called "Advanced Building Components," or "ABC" modular homes, are a product line of Advanced Shelter Solutions Inc. of Tarpon Springs. They cost \$70,000 to \$95,000, resist winds above 150 mph and take only a month from delivery to move-in day.

They might be a solution to Arcadia's post-Charley housing shortage, Ardovini says.

"When I saw the destruction I thought, 'There's got to be a better way.'"

Ardovini said the factory will cost about \$6 million, which he plans to finance with his own money and that of investors. He is working with Arcadia officials to find a five- to 10-acre site.

If he succeeds in building the plant and churning out 1,000 homes annually, it will represent a dramatic increase in production of ABC homes.

Michael Wolfe, patent holder of the ABC homes' panel system, builds 25 to 50 each year at his Tarpon Springs plant.

Wolfe started building the homes in 2001. Their insulated panel system withstands heavy wind, cuts a homeowner's energy costs in half, resists fire and takes only days to install, he says.

One thing they lack, Wolfe says, is licensed factories to build more of them. That's where Ardovini comes in.

Ardovini's Arcadia plant would help turn out sturdy homes that residents could feel safe in, Wolfe says.

"Everybody knows you don't want to be in a modular home when a hurricane comes. If it's 120, 130 mph, I would stay in" an ABC home, he says.

Ardovini, 52, made his fortune building in New York. He left his mark on the bustling Westchester County commuter city of White Plains, and built corporate headquarters near the World Trade Center.

He became an active disaster relief volunteer after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks at the trade center. That zeal carried over to last fall, when he signed up to help Charley victims.

Ardovini applied his construction background to the relief effort, and helped coordinate other volunteers working on Arcadia's battered housing stock.

Since moving to Arcadia, Ardovini has designed 10 homes and built 10 others. But he wanted to build more, faster, and opened an office on June 1. Arcadia is now his permanent home.

He found out about ABC homes through classes about affordable housing, where an instructor linked him with Matt Ross, president of Sarasota-based Eco-Smart Inc. Eco-Smart sells Wolfe's products at its Sarasota headquarters.

"It's a unique type of modular home," Ross says.

ABC homes can serve as a replacement for a mobile home or sit on a regular

residential lot. They differ from most modular homes because they arrive with a 64,000-pound concrete slab.

The heavy slab means even if a hurricane comes through, "it's not going anywhere," Ross says.

Ross, whose business sells energy-efficient and disaster-resistant home products, aggressively markets the four ABC models, one of which is a modular classroom.

The company has built about 70 homes since 2001. Wolfe said he's also talking with developers in Ocala and Collier County's Immokalee about opening plants.

"Really, the appeal is that in the traditional way of building manufactured or modular homes, the building hasn't been improved for 30 years or more. Until now," Wolfe says. "The demand is huge."

Ed Strube, Arcadia's city administrator, says the city is working with Ardovini to find a site for the plant. He said he expects the city and developer to also discuss options for financing a site.

Strube said the plant could be a big boost for the city. It could bring 100 jobs to Arcadia, Ardovini said.

"I don't think you can have enough manufacturers, especially in the affordable housing range," Strube says. "Everyone's looking for something that would turn out quality and quantity."

Quality and quantity are exactly what Ardovini wants.

"There's a myth when people hear 'modular home.' They think trailers, they think mobile homes.

"That's not so."
