



WISCONSIN STATE FAIR

Your guide — Inside



'Kids from Wisconsin' to perform in Kenosha — B1



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SUBMITTED PHOTO
Simple, easy-to-assemble homes like this one are being manufactured for poor residents of Mexico. The homes feature materials made by Cordeck, a Kenosha company.

Local company helps with housing for poor

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A local steel manufacturer is contributing to an effort to provide low-cost housing for poor people in developing nations.

Kenosha-based Cordeck is working with the Arial Home Initiative, fabricating steel panels that will be used to build simple homes for people living in poverty. Arial's aim is to build 250 small factories in poor communities worldwide, with the goal of building 1 million of the homes over the next 10 years.

The 300-square-foot, two-room homes are simply built from kits using insulated steel panels that slide into anchor channels. The houses include a sink and small bathroom with a toilet and shower, a vinyl floor and a ceiling fan.

Tom Pirelli, a venture capitalist and former chief executive of a software company, founded the Arial Home Initiative. He said he launched the project after he and his wife volunteered to work in Ensenada, Mexico, building small homes for people living in slums in the city. The houses being built at that time were made of plywood with black-shingled roofs that turned the non-insulated houses into ovens in the summer.

Pirelli wanted to design houses that would be durable, insulated, comfortable and "green," with the goal of making each inexpensive home easy to assemble in a day.

The houses are small, Pirelli said, but replace cardboard and tarp-covered shanties that families are living in in the slums of poverty-stricken cities in developing countries.

"These are palaces compared to what they are used to," he said.

Cordeck, which custom manufactures steel components, was enlisted to make the prototypes for the steel panels.

"Cordeck was an adviser and a big supporter," said Pirelli, speaking from Ensenada, where the organization is assembling homes. "We couldn't have done this without them."

Jennifer Dooley, a spokeswoman for Cordeck, said the company worked with Arial to modify the design to meet production capabilities.

"Being a part of this project that will benefit so many families in need has been a terrific experience for our entire company," said Kenneth Moore, Cordeck president, in a statement.

The first prototype was assembled at a warehouse in Lake Forest, Ill., in mid-July. This week Arial, along with a group of about 40 volunteer high school students, are in Mexico assembling houses that will be used for families.

Pirelli has already built a small factory in Ensenada, where the home components will be manufactured. While Cordeck built the prototypes for the panels for the homes, the modular homes will ultimately be built at factories near the communities where the homes are used.

Cordeck sold the machinery it used to make the panels to Arial for the Ensenada factory, and Steve Zeis, Cordeck's operations manager, will travel to Mexico to teach workers there how to make the components.

"The goal is to make this self-sustainable," Pirelli said.

While the houses, which each cost \$5,000, will initially be given away, the ultimate goal is to have working-poor families take out micro-loans to buy the houses.