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STORM 2007 UPDATE

Storm protection for shutterless

Couple's last-minute plywood alternative turns into new lightweight product.

By JANIS FONTAINE
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

As Hurricane Frances bore down on Orlando in 2004, homeowners John D. Smith and Lark Kruse had a problem: They'd waited too long to buy plywood.

Desperate, the couple — they've since split — searched the house for an alternative.

Their business made hubcap wheel covers screen-printed with advertising that fastened directly to the wheels of vehicles, and they had the corrugated plastic sheets and special heavy-duty fasteners that they used to make those covers at hand.

They cut the sheets of high-impact plastic to fit their windows and used the Velcro-like fasteners to secure the sheets to the window frame. It worked.

Not only did the sheets protect the window, Smith said. They also allowed



Smith

light in.

"Sure, we got the idea by accident," Smith said by phone, "but we had to intentionally go after it to create a product. What I'm most proud of is how it helps people. Some people can't lift plywood and some can't afford shutters. What are they to do?"

Nearly 5,000 people have outfitted

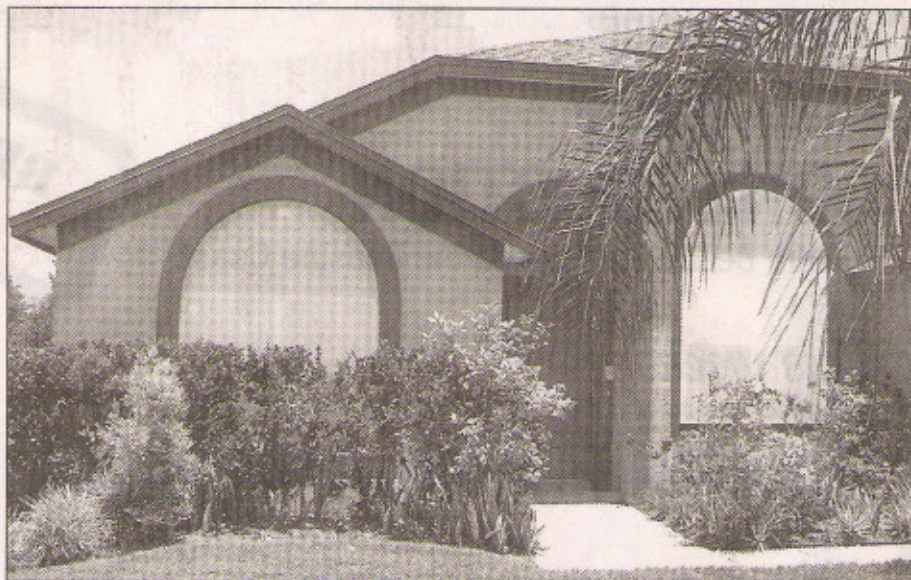


Photo courtesy of Storm Stoppers

WINDOW TREATMENT: Storm Stoppers, which have passed tests for 125 mph winds, let in light and are lighter than plywood. Velcro-like fasteners hold them in place.

their homes with Storm Stoppers, Smith said, including Arnold Berkenfeld of Lake Worth, who learned of them when his country club began to use them.

"What a nice thing," Berkenfeld said. "When I put them up, my wife, Shelby, said, 'We're sitting in the light!'"

Berkenfeld said his Storm Stoppers protected his home without a problem during Wilma.

Storm Stoppers have been tested to withstand winds of more than 125 mph. They cost about \$4 per square foot.

Smith said he would like to get the product on the state building code's

list of approved products, but to do that, he'd have to redesign the plastic sheets to be bolted onto the house. But one advantage of Storm Stoppers is that in an emergency, occupants can get out of their shuttered house by merely pushing out against the plastic sheet, and Smith said he doesn't want to sacrifice the safety of the product to meet state code.

For more information, go to www.storm-stoppers.com, or call (877) 253-8371. In Palm Beach County, Storm Stoppers are available from Hurricane Protection Services at (561) 248-9472.

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