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Why this Canadian developer launched its U.S. homebuilding division in Houston

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A Canadian developer has entered the U.S. market, building its first home in Houston.

Empire — which has built more than 10,000 homes and condominiums in Canada — began expanding to Houston four years ago. The Toronto-based developer, under its land division Empire Continental Land, has developed a few hundred home lots in four new residential communities across the Bayou City.

Now, Empire plans to build its own homes in the U.S.

Earlier this year, Empire launched Empire Communities, a new homebuilding division that is under construction on its first home in Houston. Empire's first U.S. home — a one-story, four-bedroom model spanning 2,200 square feet — is going up in Dellrose, [Empire's new 600-acre community in Hockley, northwest of Houston](#).

Empire Communities is led by [James Miller](#) and Carl "Wade" Bradow Jr., formerly with MHI Homes. Miller serves as Empire Communities' U.S. division president and Bradow is Empire's executive vice president.

[Andrew Guizzetti](#), executive vice president and CFO, said Empire has big plans for the U.S. market. Guizzetti, a son of one of Empire's founders, said he chose to start in Houston after he became enamored by the Texas hunting, Blue Bell ice cream and pecan pie.

"We wanted to diversify, but we wanted to dip our toe in the market first," Guizzetti said. "Although we entered the market as a land developer, we always knew at some point, we wanted add a homebuilding division. We see great opportunity, especially on the lot side, in Houston."

Empire Communities will start building homes within its own communities, but plans to expand to master-planned communities from other developers. The homebuilder is in talks with several developers to



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Andrew Guizzetti is the executive vice president and CFO of Empire, a Toronto-based developer expanding to Houston and the United States.

establish lot positions in communities across the Bayou City, Guizzetti said.

Empire Communities is also mulling developing multifamily properties in Houston, perhaps 3- and 4-story condominium buildings, Guizzetti said.

As its ramps up its U.S. homebuilding division, Empire — which has 300 employees in Canada — plans to hire more employees in Texas. Miller said he plans to hire eight to 10 new employees over the next six months.

Empire's new homebuilding expansion comes as Houston is still reeling from the oil slump. But Guizzetti said he is unfazed by the energy downturn.

"Houston is a great market and the fundamentals are still strong," Guizzetti said. "There are 25,000 home starts, still in the top 3 in the nation. There's good housing, still job creation and great diversity. Houston is not Calgary, which is Houston 30 years ago. Houston's economy is more diversified."

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