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Kitson & Partners: Climate Change and the Future of Real Estate in Florida

In late September 2022, real estate developer Syd Kitson sat in his southwest Florida home watching the news about Hurricane Ian. It was roaring right toward Kitson and his neighbors in Babcock Ranch, the 18,000-acre master-planned community he had spent over 15 years of his life designing. On the news, Kitson watched scene after scene of debris-covered streets surrounding blasted structures and roofless houses. Hurricanes in Florida had a proven record of immense destruction, but he hoped Babcock Ranch would live up to his mission for the community and withstand the storm.

When the storm ended, the Category 4 hurricane would be rated the fifth-strongest ever to hit the United States, destroying over 11,000 homes and damaging 68,000.¹ While Kitson had been sitting just 15 miles northeast of Ft. Myers, one of many nearby cities that was severely damaged by the hurricane,² he and his 5,000 neighbors in Babcock Ranch had electricity, were fully connected to the internet, and suffered minimal flooding or wind damage.³ During the hours the storm hurled destruction in the region, residents of the ranch were able to shelter in place and watch the destruction live on their televisions and other mobile devices.

Why did Babcock Ranch survive while neighboring towns did not? Because Syd Kitson had successfully developed his vision for a resilient, sustainable, and storm-proof community in southwest Florida.ⁱ

Residing in Babcock Ranch, the self-proclaimed first solar-powered town in America, Kitson considered its resilience after the town's first bout with a climate change-powered storm.⁴ He knew that his decisions to build homes around natural water flow-ways, employ stronger home materials like impact glass, and implement smart lake water management systems would improve the town's chances of survival against a

ⁱ While this case was created based on research from publicly available sources, the unspoken thoughts of Syd Kitson are the creation of the case authors, based on available information, to enable a more robust student learning experience.

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