

# GREENING UP THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Energy efficiency becoming necessity in  
real estate, construction industries

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**D**ELAVAN — It seems you can't turn around without hearing talk about "going green" — the focus on conservation and improvement of the natural environment, both for its own sake as well as its importance to civilization.

The same holds true in the local real estate and home-construction industries. Customers are asking what they can do to make their homes more energy-efficient and friendly to the environment, and companies are advertising building practices that focus on these goals.



LYNN GREENE/STAFF

**Dan Pether, owner of Greenstone Builders in Lake Geneva, stands in the kitchen of a Green Built Home he recently completed in Delavan, shown in the inset photo. The open-concept kitchen features granite counters and energy-efficient appliances. The home also carries an Energy Star certification.**

"We do get people looking for green-built," said Grace Hirte, executive director of the Lakeland Builders Association. "We had a lot of people looking at our green display at (our) home expo (in March). Other countries (like) Australia and Holland have been using these types of measures for some time. With the different (industry) journals that we get, it's front-page news."

Dan Pether, owner of Greenstone Builders in Lake Geneva, tries to encourage his customers to go green whenever possible.

"I always try to present the green option to people," he said. "Some people are a little slow to come around, but once you start laying out the idea of energy efficiency, they come around."

Pether recently completed a home at 4310 Silverwood Drive near Delavan Lake that qualifies for the Wisconsin Environmental Initiative's Green Built Home Program. Under the program, which is endorsed by the Wisconsin Builders Association and available to all builders, homeowners work with builders to select energy-efficient and environmentally friendly features from a checklist. Each item is assigned a point value; the project must earn a minimum number of points to be certified.

Such programs help customers and builders define "green."

"Our builders were faced with a challenge," said WBA Executive Vice President Bill Wendle. "Customers would request green building practices, yet both the builder and customer struggled to identify exactly what 'shade of green' to follow."

Wendle said the program has helped people better understand green practices.

"Consumers and builders now have a definitive checklist of what constitutes a green building," he said.

Pether is one of two LBA builder members that specialize in green building. The other is Jeff Auberger of Conservation Development in Elkhorn. Pether's Silverwood Drive home and a home Auberger built in Sharon both will be featured during the LBA's annual Parade of Homes, held the last weekend in July and the first weekend in August.

Tom Krawczyk of TJH Energy Consulting assembled the green display for the LBA's recent home expo. Krawczyk helps builders get their homes certified as Energy Star homes. Similar to the Green Built Home program, an Energy Star home must meet a minimum level of energy efficiency. The program, however, is flexible enough for the contractor and homeowner to choose how to meet the criteria.

For example, Pether's home is solar-power-ready, but to keep costs down for the initial homebuyer, the panels are not yet installed.

"We have the roof area at the right pitch and direction for solar panels," he said. "We ran the conduit down from the roof to the electrical panel, so if the owner wants to complete the solar connection, it will be relatively easy to do."

Pether's Energy Star rating was based on three visits from Krawczyk.

"We do two pre-drywall inspections," Krawczyk said. "We look at the framing for air-stop or air-blockage issues and insulation. On the second inspection, we look at the insulation for quality, type and grade."

The final test includes infrared scanning of all walls and ceilings.

Pether achieved his Energy Star rating with several techniques a homebuyer won't necessarily see at first glance.

"The biggest stuff is the forced-air heating, all high-efficiency mechanicals, (2-inch by 6-inch) exterior (studs) so we can add more insulation, that kind of thing," he said. "The concrete slabs have an extra two inches of insulation. We went above and beyond."

Green practices aside, the home still must appeal to buyers to be marketable. Pether's house features an open design, granite countertops, carpets made from recycled materials, dual-flush toilets that save up to 2,000 gallons of water per year and bamboo flooring. Christine Fox, of Century 21 Affiliated in Delavan, has shown the home to potential buyers.

"People hear bamboo and they think, 'What is that?'" she said. "But when they see it, they fall in love with it. It looks like a hardwood floor, but it's very sustainable and durable. Believe me, it's going to hold up."

Fox said the home has opened many eyes to new ways of building.

"People are shocked to see that it's a regular home," she said. "When they hear green home, they might think of a dome home or something, but they're always surprised it looks just like any other home."

While builders struggle to find the right mix of green products and a traditional look for their homes, buyers sometimes find it challenging to navigate through all the new products and terminology. The real estate market has taken notice, and now offers agents an Ecobroker certification.

Sally Weaver-Landers, of Shorewest Realtors in Janesville, recently became Rock County's first Ecobroker.

"Environmentally friendly housing is no longer a fringe movement," she said. "Now, energy-efficient housing is becoming a part of the mainstream (and) all consumers can take advantage of this common-sense building strategy."

Agents earn the designation by learning about the energy, environmental and green strategies and home-building techniques.

Some contractors believe the green movement still is in its infancy.

"There's a big demand now and it's getting bigger for these types of services," Krawczyk said.