

Home Energy Conference - Saving energy at home

Contributed by Kevin Goodwin
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More and more people are becoming conscious of the environment and what they can do to protect it, especially within their own home.

Some local companies are doing their part too. SAS Builders LLC and Phinney Design Group joined forces for The Point at Moss Creek, an environmentally friendly and energy efficient development. The 80 acre parcel will house 12 units, each custom designed and unique, when completed. Three homes are built, a fourth is in the construction process and a fifth is slated to begin construction in the spring. Sara Marchand, an associate broker with Weichert Realtors Northeast Group, said the other seven lots are still for sale. Mike Phinney of Phinney Design Group on Grand Avenue said before any construction begins, he and Alec Stephens, president of SAS Builders LLC, sit down and look at the layout of each lot. They look to see what landscaping they can preserve, like older trees and rock formations. Phinney is no stranger to designing environmentally friendly buildings either. "I did my college thesis on environmental awareness and architecture," Phinney said. When it comes to site planning a house, Phinney and Stephens look at everything and ways they can respect nature. "We also look at how we can protect the house from northern winds," Phinney said. "There are a lot of basic aspects in designing that people overlook." He said very simple geometrics of the house can save the home owner energy. Window placement for southern exposure is key, according to Stephens. "You have to take advantage of energy efficiency naturally," he said. Insulation of the home is another key to saving money in heating the home. Stephens uses a combination of fiber glass and foam in his homes. "The foam expands and seals all the little cracks," Phinney said. Most homes use insulation based on the "R-value" rating. The R-value signifies the ability of a material to resist heat flow; so the higher the R-value, the greater the heat flow resistance. "We are exceeding R-values dramatically," Stephens said. Stephens said he focuses on energy efficiency in every house he builds. "It's what I promote," he said. He recommends to all his clients to use Energy Star appliances that are energy efficient. Energy Star creates a benchmark for a variety of home related items and gives customers a comparison in energy savings. In the end the client makes the choice of what they want. Other cost savers is motion-censored lights and using fluorescent lights. Stephens said when you flip on a switch in a normal house the light goes right to 100 percent, so dimmers can be a cost saver too. Phinney said a lot of cost savings is user based, like turning off the lights when you aren't in that room. Phinney said many of the appliances pay for themselves within three to five years. He said 40 to 50 percent of energy efficiency is providing clients with the right information and letting them know what options are out there. Metal roofing keeps the attic much cooler in the summer and keeps the heating costs down in the winter, according to Stephens. He said the initial cost of putting on a metal roof might be more expensive, but like most energy efficient building techniques, it is very economic and can last four to five times longer than an asphalt roof. Stephens said the market has been receptive to energy efficient homes. "As energy prices start to rise, people are becoming more environmentally conscious," Stephens said. He said he recommends to clients to do as much research as they can on energy efficiency and ways they can potentially save money. "That way they can make a well informed decision," he said. "He said the average size of a home has increased from 900-square-feet to 2,400-square-feet in the last 50 years. "Houses need to be catered to families needs," Phinney said. Stephens said they can design a 2,400-square-foot house that functions better than a 4,500-square-foot home. For Marchand, selling an energy efficient home is not much different than any other home. "I just emphasize and high light the energy savers," she said. "People are saving money in their pocket and saving the environment."