

CONSTRUCTION

Decker Homes strives to build Net Zero Energy homes

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Decker Homes is building a home with energy-efficient features that could qualify it as the first Net Zero Energy home in Northwest Ohio and possibly the entire state.

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The 2,400-square-foot ranch home with full basement is being built for Bob and Barbara Schmitt in the Deer Valley subdivision in Monclova Township.

“It is the most energy-efficient home we have built thus far and could qualify as a Net Zero home that produces as much energy as it uses,” said Bill Decker, president of Decker Homes.

The Schmitt home includes “green” energy-efficient features, such as the Owens Corning Energy Complete whole home insulation and air-sealing system, WaterFurnace geothermal heating and cooling system, Jeld-Wen windows with a 30 U-value, insulated door and window headers and a fully insulated partially finished basement, all designed to reduce energy costs by 50 percent.

“Net Zero is very achievable and the Schmitts’ home could qualify for Net Zero with solar power,” Decker said.

The Schmitts have applied for a grant with the Ohio Department of Development for the 6-kilowatt solar system they would like to install in their home. The grant would pay for much of the cost of the solar system planned for the home, Decker said.

However, the Ohio grant program expires in December unless the state legislature renews the program.

“The price of solar is dropping every year with the new technologies being developed,” Decker said.

He has compared and analyzed previous homes built with solar and geothermal to determine that increased insulation with the 6-kilowatt solar system would qualify for Net Zero status.



Bill Decker of Decker Homes, left, shows the insulated header concept to Bob Schmitt in a model home at Deer Valley.

"Energy-efficient features don't cost anything because it's going to save in lower heating costs. You may pay a little more to the bank on your mortgage but pay much less for utilities," Decker said.

With all of the energy-efficient features, the Schmitt home will have estimated household utility costs of \$89 per month.

"It's easier to save money than having to earn it to pay energy bills. I don't want to use fossil fuels and pay utility companies to heat and cool our house," Bob Schmitt said.

Decker and Schmitt shared their dedication to saving energy before knowing each other.

"I looked at Bill's homes from the start and liked the quality of homes they build. I knew I wanted him to build our house and I'm well-satisfied with the way the house is being built. He does a lot of things other builders don't do," Schmitt said.

Schmitt is a retired plumber and pipefitter who worked on commercial and industrial buildings. He is a former construction manager for A&P Foods in Michigan and Ohio.

Overcashier and Horst, a heating and air-conditioning contractor in Sylvania, is installing the geothermal system manufactured by WaterFurnace in Fort Wayne, Ind. The system uses the Earth's constant 55-degree temperature underground for heating and cooling the home and qualifies for energy tax credits, according to Mike Horst, a comfort consultant for the firm.

Energy-efficient appliances for the homes come from the Appliance Center in Maumee, and the lighting comes from the Lighting Gallery in Sylvania.

Decker said he has worked with Owens Corning since 1982, using the company's energy-saving products in homes his firm has built. The company provided product displays and marketing materials for use in Decker's model home at Deer Valley.

Owens Corning designs and makes products to reduce energy usage and greenhouse gas emissions. It partners with builders who promote energy efficiency to get that message to consumers, said Terri Poland, area sales manager at Owens Corning.

Decker Homes built its fourth solar electric home, combining renewable technologies of solar energy with a geothermal heating and cooling system, scoring a 35 on the Home Energy Rating Scale (HERS) or 65 percent more efficient than code, he said.

One of the homes Decker built in Deer Valley for Carol Bintz is rated 35 on HERS with solar and geothermal systems. Bintz said her electric bill for the first year totaled \$530 and she is considering expansion of her solar system with the goal of making it a Net Zero home.

Dovetail Solar and Wind designed and installed the solar photovoltaic electric system for the Bintz home and others built by Decker, according to Bruce Gonring, regional sales manager of the business located in the Alternative Energy Incubator at the University of Toledo.

Decker's finished model home at Deer Valley is similar to both Bintz's house and the one being built for the Schmitts. It is rated 47 on HERS without solar power. All of the homes the firm now builds are 5-Star Plus Energy Star homes rated 70 or less, Decker said.

Decker Homes received a certificate of recognition from the Department of Energy (DOE) for outstanding leadership and commitment to green building in 2009. The firm became an inaugural member of the DOE's Builders Challenge program in 2008, which requires members to build homes at least 30 percent more efficient than code with a goal of building Net Zero homes.

Decker Homes became an Energy Star builder in 1998 and upgraded to 100 percent Energy Star homes in 2000. Located in Lambertville, Mich., the firm builds single-family homes in Northwest Ohio and Southeast Michigan.