

# { Flagstaff's Green Builder }

## Raising the Energy Bar

By David Carpenter

In the future, the housing industry will be judged on the impact our homes have on the environment. In the next five to 10 years, homes that do not measure up from an energy standpoint will be considered obsolete. Energy efficiency is fast becoming the platform on which homes are built, remodeled and judged. To what extent this trend evolves, and at what rate, will depend on how quickly homeowners accept the cost benefit relationship associated with energy efficient development and construction. In many ways, green construction is already becoming the new standard for development. According to a study done by the United States Green Building Council, green building will support 7.9 million jobs and add \$554 billion to the U.S. economy through 2013.

Since the EPA launched the ENERGY STAR program in 2005, it has registered over one million homes, and claims to have saved homeowners \$1.2 billion on their utility bills. ENERGY STAR is only one program in a growing field of systems designed to

reduce energy consumption in today's buildings. Several local builders employ energy efficient building strategies found in both the USGBC's LEED for homes program, as well as the Coconino County Sustainability Program. Although most of today's programs are voluntary, the industry could see new regulations soon that would mandate a much greater emphasis on sustainable construc-

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tion. The International Code Council, a group of building officials that shape our building codes nationally, will vote later this year on adopting a new model building code for the nation that will result in a 30 percent gain in home energy efficiency.

There is a growing body of evidence to support the idea that a more efficient build-

ing cycle is here to stay. A multitude of tax breaks and incentives have been implemented at both the federal and local levels. Those incentives will continue to drive down utility costs for homeowners, and help persuade them to see the benefit of spending more up front in order to achieve a more efficient home that will pay them back over a lifetime.

The key to any comprehensive change

in the building industry is to find builders that embrace a holistic approach to building, and who understand the building sciences. Simply putting in better windows if a home has other significant deficiencies will not solve any problems; it will only cost the homeowner more money. A whole-house approach that focuses on the entire thermal

envelope will mean that less framing can be used, more efficient insulation is used, shorter duct runs are employed, and smaller heating equipment will be needed. This will result in buildings that cost much less to operate and maintain over the long run, and will eventually lead to builders guaranteeing performance and offering much longer warranties than are currently standard. It is becoming clear that energy efficiency will be the new benchmark for future competitiveness. Builders will either change to meet the new demand or go away! **FBN**

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