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COMMENTARY: Want to help WNC? Get into green building

By Gayle Jann

WNC Green Building Council

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What is green building? How can I reduce my utility bills? How can I reduce my heating costs? How can I help clean up the air in my community and in my indoor living environment? How can I help control the mold and moisture in my house?

Are these questions you may have heard or asked yourself?

The Western North Carolina Green Building Council is a nonprofit organization based in Asheville created for the purpose of answering these questions. Our mission statement is "to promote environmentally responsible and health conscious building practices through community education." This includes education on building practices that are energy and resource efficient using environmentally sensitive site work. We also promote creating clean air quality through use of low toxic products and ventilation strategies.

The council presents quarterly educational forums. Past forums have included solar tax credits, native landscaping, green power, energy efficient mortgages, Million Solar Roofs Initiatives, passive solar, indoor air quality and smart growth in Western North Carolina.

Two green/solar building tours a year are organized by the council showcasing various types of building construction with energy efficient design, green building principles and active and passive solar construction/orientation. This year the Million Solar Roofs Initiative plans to develop a sustained regional tour featuring a home with a renewable energy system each month.

With oil prices topping \$60 a barrel, the question of energy efficiency can no longer be ignored. Oil is a non-renewable resource of which we have a finite supply. The council focuses on renewable energy sources as well as a catalyst for learning to utilize efficient practices. The surprising facts are that in the United States, buildings account for 36 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, 30 percent of raw materials use, 30 percent of waste output and 12 percent of potable water consumption.

Peter Pfeiffer, a green building and solar specialist architect, says there are three things we can do. If every American replaced all their light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs, replaced all windows with double pane energy efficient windows and drove cars that got three to five miles per gallon better gas mileage, we could end our dependence on foreign oil. Imagine that!

The point is that if we all just became more conscious and educated, we could make a huge impact on our environment and quality of life by doing just a little bit.

The green building council creates a Green Building Directory with many local resources and numerous articles on green building issues. This is free and available throughout Asheville in places such as French Broad Food Co-op, Earth Fare, GreenLife, Malaprop's and Haywood Road Market.

Mountain Housing Opportunities is currently building an affordable housing project located between Clingman Avenue and Jefferson Street. The council received a grant to oversee the green building aspect of this project. Seventeen of the housing units will be certified through the N.C. HealthyBuilt Homes Program and will include solar hot water, sealed crawl spaces, use of low VOC (volatile organic compound) products, and framing methods that allow for maximized insulation. HealthyBuilt Homes is a local program that gives guidelines and offers different levels of "green certification" for residential homes.

The time is now to start making green building the norm and not the exception in the construction industry. If consumers educate themselves and ask for greener, healthier buildings, they can make a difference and create buildings that are healthy for the inhabitants and the environment.

For more information about green building or how to become a member or volunteer, visit our Web site www.wncgbc.org. You can find upcoming events, links and information on modern building practices and energy related issues. Please contact us with any questions at: The Green Building hotline: call 232-5080 or e-mail info@wncgbc.org.

Gayle Jann is a volunteer for the WNC Green Building Council. She has served on the board and executive committee as secretary and she is currently working on a new Web site for the organization.

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