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COMMENTARY: Green building benefits environment, homeowner

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WNC GREEN BUILDING COUNCIL

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So, you are thinking about building a green home. How can you assure that your house is built to “green” or environmentally friendly standards? “Green” standards can cover a wide spectrum of possibilities from energy efficiency to straw bale construction. North Carolina has a new green homebuilding certification process called the N.C. HealthyBuilt Homes Program. Fulfillment of this certification process can insure a home builder/owner that their house is built to specific green criteria. The N.C. HealthyBuilt Homes program is a collaborative effort led by the N.C. Solar Center at N.C. State University and includes the N.C. Office of Energy, the Western North Carolina Green Building Council, the Asheville Home Builders Association and other building professionals. Locally, the program is implemented by the Western North Carolina Green Building Council.

Enrollment of a home in the program entails both a design review and builder education. Third party inspections during construction verify compliance with criteria. Several requirements must be completed in order to accumulate points for certification. There are literally hundreds of options available to gain certification points. The certification opportunities are divided into site, water, energy, indoor air quality, materials and community categories. This can include things like using native plants for landscaping, passive solar design, proximity to public transport, using energy star appliances, and incorporating recycled materials.

Why build a HealthyBuilt Home? Building a home according to the HealthyBuilt Home standards results in a high performing, long-lasting, energy efficient home. A home of this caliber demands a higher price on the real estate market. More importantly, there is less cost to the environment for a N.C. HealthyBuilt Home. Environmental benefits include decreased construction waste, decreased resource consumption, longer lasting materials, native landscaping, and better indoor air quality. All of these goals can be accomplished without having a substantial impact on the construction budget. In fact, an added benefit of decreased resource use is lower monthly energy bills. If Energy Star certification is incorporated into HealthyBuilt Homes certification, Progress Energy will offer a transferable 5 percent discount on the homeowner’s energy bill. Some mortgage companies are helping out by offering an Energy Efficient Mortgage product in which the homeowner can qualify for up to a 5 percent increase in lendable value of an Energy Star certified HealthyBuilt Home. These aspects make a green, HealthyBuilt Home desirable for homeowners.

Our home is the first HealthyBuilt Home built in North Carolina. The home was certified in November 2004 and was built in Black Mountain. The 1,400 square foot home was built for \$110 per square foot. Utility bills are minimal and indoor air quality is exceptional. Currently, around fifty homes are slated to be certified, most of which are in the Asheville area.

HealthyBuilt Homes is an exciting new program for the N.C. construction industry. This program is following in the footsteps of other municipalities that have great success with similar programs. The Asheville area has the necessary interest in the green building movement to successfully support such a program. For more information, contact the WNC Green Building Council at 232-5080 or info@wncgbc.org.

Rob Moody is vice president of WNC Green Building Council.

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