

No carbon at the inn

By [Dale Neal](#)

DNEAL@CITIZEN-TIMES.COM

July 22, 2007 12:15 am

MARSHALL — Walker and Doug Silsbee recycled an old tobacco barn into the Bend of Ivy Lodge, offering a retreat center for conferences, weddings and spiritual gatherings on 63 acres of farmland and woods along the Ivy River.

The Silsbees wanted to offer their guests more than a beautiful place to visit and reconnect with the natural environment, but also a place that wasn't contributing to the environmental problems facing the planet.

After investing about \$300,000 to restore the barn into a lodge, the Silsbees have committed their business to energy efficiency and carbon neutrality. Bend of Ivy is the region's first business that's not adding any more of the greenhouse gases to the atmosphere, which scientists say are contributing to climate change.

"It's the right thing to do," said Walker Silsbee who sees a moral commitment to combat climate change. "The bottom line is that we have to do the right thing for our children."

But the Silsbees also see it as good business sense as more consumers begin to choose green products and services that don't contribute to a global problem.

"I'd like to see Bend of Ivy come up first on Google as 'carbon-neutral lodge,'" Doug Silsbee said.

"We wanted to be harmony with the environment, so it wasn't much of a leap for us to go to carbon neutrality," he said.

Offsetting guests

The Silsbees wanted to help their 1,200 to 1,500 visitors each year to make that leap as well. Guests drive to this remote lodge just over the Buncombe County line, and some fly in from other parts of the nation. But they can balance what carbon dioxide their car or jet engine is putting into the atmosphere by purchasing a carbon offset. The Silsbees explain to all their visitors that for every ton of carbon dioxide, a \$15 contribution could plant trees or add solar panels or change light bulbs that would reduce those greenhouse gases.

The Silsbees offer to match their guests' contributions up to 5 percent of the total bill for a particular retreat. The money goes to Appalachian Offsets, a local voluntary program sponsored by the Green Building Council of Western North Carolina, Waste Energy Partners and the Clean Air Community Trust. The Silsbees were eager supporters of the nonprofit, helping it get off the ground.

"The Silsbees are definitely the first business in the area to go carbon neutral," said Maggie Leslie, of the Green Building Council. "They are going a step further, encouraging their guests."

Sizing up

The Silsbees started by estimating their own carbon footprint. Looking over their utility bills and transportation costs, they figured that they were pumping some 55 tons of carbon dioxide annually into the atmosphere.

“We made another pass at the weather-stripping, and replaced every light bulb, putting some on dimmers, which use even less electricity,” Doug Silsbee said.

They replaced an obsolete furnace in their home, separate from the lodge, with a state-of-the-art wood-burning stove. They’ve also replaced old farm windows with more energy-efficient double-paned windows.

“We do a lot of laundry as a lodge,” Walker Silsbee said.

The Silsbees also invested in frontloading washers and dryers that use less energy. They’ve also gone to an on-demand hot water heater

An audit from Waste Energy Partners suggested putting a timer on the waterfall on the outside pond, shutting off the pump at night.

They’re also looking into partnering with an organic farmer to put a garden on the property that could be used by their caterer. “It’s potentially a three-way win,” said Doug Silsbee.

With about \$7,500 in energy-efficiency investments over the past year and half, the Silsbees have also made about \$2,000 in carbon offset contributions, bringing their business into carbon neutrality.

But everyone can play a part, said Walker Silsbee. “Anyone can change a light bulb. It’s the first step in consuming less.”

On the Net: www.bendofivylodge.com

Want to know more?

Appalachian Offsets, a local nonprofit sponsored by the Green Building Council of Western North Carolina, Waste Energy Partners and the Clean Air Community Trust. After people reduce their own energy use and carbon footprint, they can purchase offsets that will pay for local projects.

Appalachian Offsets will have its first major project on Sept. 11 when UNC Asheville students replace 5,000 lightbulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs for the Asheville Housing Authority. Those bulbs will save 1,450 tons of carbon dioxide from going into the atmosphere, according to Maggie Leslie of the Green Building Council of WNC.

For more information, click on www.AppalachianOffsets.org

Use of this site signifies your agreement to the [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#).

Copyright 2007 Asheville Citizen-Times. All rights reserved.