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This Elmhurst home is designed to achieve gold certified status for energy conservation.

## New green home goes 'gold'

May 7, 2009

### STYCZYNSKI WALKER & ASSOCIATES

Styczynski Walker & Associates has turned green into gold, as evidenced by their latest creation: a new two-story home that has earned gold-level certified status as part of the National Association of Home Builders' (NAHB) Green Building Program.

"Currently, there are only a known handful of homes throughout Chicagoland that have achieved or will be achieving gold-certified status," said Bill Styczynski, architect/president of the Willowbrook-based design/build firm.

Certified to the gold level means that the home's energy efficiency is at least 40 percent greater than the 2003 International Energy Conservation Code, which equates to major savings on utility bills.

It also indicates that the builder has netted a minimum number of points in various categories on an NAHB checklist of voluntary green features that were incorporated into the home.

"Building green doesn't mean simply adding a few compact fluorescent light bulbs and low-flow toilets" Styczynski said. "Green building is necessary because every home constructed today will have an impact on our environment for the next 50 to 100 years. We cannot create homes like they are a disposable commodity. We must build energy efficient and sustainable residences. And green building is not just for new homes, but should be considered for renovations and additions, too."

Green certification by the NAHB is based on a program that requires a holistic approach to designing and building homes, noted Styczynski. Energy efficiency is an important aspect of the program, "but just as important is managing resources, indoor air quality, water efficiency and lot design."

In short, says Styczynski, "gold signifies that this is much greener than your average green home."

Indeed, the four-bedroom, 2,550-square-foot Elmhurst abode is loaded with amenities designed to reduce heating and cooling costs, increase comfort and put less stress on the planet. These include:

- Recycled content building materials, such as cellulose insulation
- Materials made from renewable resources, including bamboo floors, special lumber and plywood sheathing
- Water-efficient toilets, faucets and other showerheads

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- Energy Star-rated appliances, ceiling fans and exhaust fans
- A 200-square-foot unshaded roof area for future solar panels
- Low VOC interior paints, sealants and adhesives
- No added urea formaldehyde in doors, cabinets and other similar products
- Motion detectors in the upstairs bathrooms that trigger a hot water circulation pump when someone enters the bathroom, thereby providing hot water on demand while reducing water and energy consumption.

Perhaps the home's most interesting component is the state-of-the-art open loop geothermal system. The system takes advantage of the earth's constant temperature (approximately 55°F) to effectively heat and cool the home using water pumped up from a well and then discharged back into an injection well in the rear yard.

The conditioned air is then distributed throughout the house via oversized ductwork using a variable speed blower. The ductwork is sealed with mastic at the joints to assure all of the conditioned air is delivered to the rooms.

Geothermal systems carry the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Energy Star Label and can be more than three times as efficient as traditional fossil fuel furnaces.

"We wanted a home that would reflect our lifestyle," said Michele LoConte, owner of the Elmhurst residence. "Being committed to going green, our first priority was maximizing energy efficiency. Our second priority was improving the air quality in our home. Third, we wanted to reduce our impact on the environment. So we researched green builders carefully, looking for someone who employed responsible building practices. We selected Bill and his firm based on his expertise and passion for green home building."

Styczynski said Michele and her husband Tom Costanzo were particularly concerned about indoor air quality. Consequently, Styczynski's team created a customized HVAC system that employs a HEPA filter, carbon filter and ultraviolet light to purify the air and which provides fresh outdoor air via an energy recovery ventilation system. He also installed a sub-slab depressurization system that is intended to mitigate the threat of radon gas.

The family is "thrilled with the results, and we can't wait to move into our new green home this spring," said Costanzo. "One of the things we like about our new home is that it doesn't scream 'green' or stick out like a sore thumb—it meshes well with other homes on the block. Plus, we were able to get many of the energy-saving and earth-friendly features we wanted on a pretty reasonable budget. Green doesn't have to mean cost-prohibitive or ultra expensive."

Styczynski and his team think it's essential for builders to follow established industry standards like those suggested in the NAHB Green Building Program to ensure consistency and quality.

"Any builder can call himself 'green,' but what does that really mean?" asked Styczynski. "Is he following best practices and conforming to reputable guidelines? Can he measure energy efficiency and demonstrate cost savings? Can his homes be certified? Does he recycle construction waste? These are important questions buyers should ask before choosing a builder they think is green."

Why the increasing push toward green? Because "more consumers and builders are getting educated about green building and the role that homes play in the future of our planet," said Styczynski. "Homeowners are increasingly mindful about rising energy costs and environmental concerns than ever before. And builders are taking a more proactive approach with a forward-thinking goal of doing what's right for the environment and the buyer."

Styczynski predicts that green building practices will become commonplace as costs come down over time and builders are able to better maximize their efficiencies.

"There was a time when anti-lock brakes and airbags were only included in a handful of cars, and automakers weren't sure if these features would become widely accepted," Styczynski said. "But today, the vast majority of new automobiles include these safety items as standard inclusions, and car buyers insist on having them. In this same vein, it is hoped that sustainable housing and green products will become more mainstream."

Styczynski Walker & Associates can design and build a custom-designed green home anywhere in the Chicagoland metropolitan area—one that is intended to cater to the lifestyles and unique needs of its occupants. For more information, call (630) 789-2513 or visit <http://www.swa-architects.com/>.

