

Cover Story

Tour EPA Energy Star Tour of Homes

'Environmentally-friendly'
and comfortable homes ... a compatible reality

Editor's note: This is the last of two parts on sustainable energy building techniques, which will be featured during the EPA Energy Star Tour of Homes starting today and continuing Sunday.

By **LILIANE PARBOT-JOHNSON**
Staff Writer

PORT CHARLOTTE - Whether they already own a home, or they contemplate building a new one, Charlotte County residents can find many energy- and money- saving features in the ST. Clair Custom Homes model on State Road 776.

The model is one of 11 entered in the EPA Energy Star Tour of Homes. The tour starts today at 10 a.m. with a seminar at the Florida House Learning Center, 4600 Beneva Road South in Sarasota. There the participating builders will have information booths and answer questions.

Both today and Sunday, the public is invited to visit the homes having qualified for the Environmental Protection Agency's label.

To earn the EPA Energy Star Label, a residence must be 30 to 35 percent more energy efficient than current building codes require. Also, they must be certified by an Independent State Licensed Energy Rater. A few of the models to be visited have rated as high as 50 to 65 percent, according to Eco-Smart Executive Director Matt Ross.

The tour is sponsored by Eco-Smart Homes and Buildings Program, which operates the Florida House Learning Center and other programs under a license from the Florida Institute for Sustainable Development.

Special events, such as driving the hybrid Toyota Prius, will occur at different times at different model homes.

To reach a high energy-efficiency rating, the builders use solar water heaters, air-conditioning units with 12-SEER efficiency or higher, a sealed duct system eliminating possibilities of leaks and various other special features, according to Ross.

Where to go

The EPA Energy Star model homes within or nearest Charlotte County are:

-Port Charlotte--St. Clair Custom Homes, 12307 McCall Road (SR 776 East, Englewood)

-Venice--Eco Homes Inc./Fiore Construction, 3748 Shamrock Drive (from U.S.41, south of Venice, approximately 2 miles on Shamrock Drive.)

-Nokomis--Eco Homes Inc./Fiore Construction, 104 and 400 Tortuga Drive, Nokomis, approximately 1/4 mile south of Oscar Scherer State Park. Going North on U.S.41, turn left on Montana, turn left on Broad Street and right on Tortuga.

-Osprey--US Home Corporation, Oxford Model at Woodlands at Rivendell, 812 Shadow Bay Way. Information about models in Sarasota and Bradenton will be available at Florida House.

These systems have been around for a long time, but for the past year they have been used increasingly. State contractors and technicians knowledgeable about the installation of each system train local people to develop a qualified work force in this area of the state, Ross said.

At the Florida House, in addition to learning how to save energy and money, visitors also find out ways to protect their health. For instance, one bathroom wall has the following advice on the wall: "Vinyl wallpapers trap moisture and give off toxins. Paper wallpaper is a safer and healthier alternative."

Safe drinking water can be drawn at the kitchen sink. An old technology using ozone is installed.

A floor plan with cross ventilation, a passive solar water heater, photovoltaic panels for solar electricity, tubular skylights -- these are only a few of old and new systems available to enjoy Florida's bounty while protecting it.

Harnessing the generous Florida sun for home energy needs is not only financially smart, it also decreases dependency on foreign oil.

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A FEW OF THE MANY FEATURES SAVING THE ENVIRONMENT AND HOME OWNERS' POCKETBOOK:

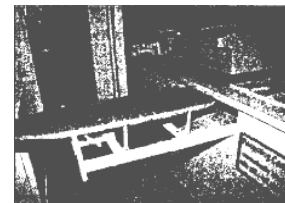


Sun Herald photos by Liliane Parbol-Johnson

Early settler's cistern returns

The cistern catching rain from the roof and used for household or garden needs is not a new technology. The large tank can be hidden underground or under a porch. At the Florida House, it stands upright and the water is only used for the yard, however, with a little additional treatment cisterns are used in some parts of Charlotte County for household needs.

Here, Florida Institute Director John Lambie (right), shows Eco-Smart Executive Director Matt Ross a tadpole, which found its way into the system. Algae never develops in the water because of a bladder that separates air from the water, Lambie said.



Out of sight when not needed

No bulky ironing board needs to be folded and stored in a closet of the Florida House. Opening a drawer of the utility room is all the effort it takes to get ready for the pressing chore.