

New CAT self-help home in Vernonia is super energy efficient

Community Action Team Inc. (CAT) serves Columbia, Clatsop and Tillamook counties by helping those who are economically disadvantaged. One of their programs is Self-help Housing. Homeowners who qualify, buy houses planned and developed by CAT staff using what is called "sweat equity" as their down payment.

One such project was just completed and celebrated in Vernonia on August 31. But, this house was a bit different than any prior self-help project put together by CAT. There were a number of differences with this project. For one thing, the self-help project was combined with flood recovery efforts and utilized Mennonite volunteers for part of the construction, saving money that was then put into turning this home into the first super energy efficient "Earth Advantage" CAT self-help home.

In addition to using LED canned lights to save energy, the home also uses compact fluorescent bulbs. This combination can reduce lighting costs by up to 75 percent. The home also has all Energy Star rated appliances. But, the real energy savings come from such techniques as Advanced Framing, an Energy Recovery Ventilation System (ERVS) and a ductless, mini-split heat

pump. Advanced Framing uses less lumber because the studs are every 24 inches instead of 16 inches, also, heat loss through the studs is eliminated by placing two inches of rigid foam insulation between the studs and the final outside wall.

The ERVS extracts warmth from the air being exhausted in the winter and extracts the coolness of the air in the summer. Then the system adds fresh air so that the air in the home is always being replaced without losing the heat or the cooling. Tight home construction results in less air getting into a house, causing stale air. ERVS keeps fresh air coming inside without increasing energy costs. The ductless, mini-split heat pump means no loss of energy through ducts. Ducts usually run through unheated, uninsulated portions of a house, causing heating or cooling losses of up to 30 percent of the total energy used. The heat system also uses infrared "eyes" to tell when people are in the room or out of the room and raises or lowers temperatures accordingly.

Additionally the 1350 square foot home has 24 inches of blown-in attic insulation and an on-demand gas water heater.

Casey Mitchell, who works for CAT in the self-help housing area, said, "it's not enough to

get people into a home if, down the road, they can no longer afford to heat it." By utilizing available energy efficiencies,

this home has an energy performance number of 32. The energy efficiency should translate into consistently low ener-

gy bills for the new homeowners, Mark and Deanna Brown.



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Top, this Vernonia house, an "Earth Advantage" home planned by Community Action Team (CAT), is a new, more energy efficient self-help house. CAT held an open house there on August 31. The new homeowners, Mark and Deanna Brown are standing in front of the garage door. Others in the picture were involved in the planning or building of the home or are visitors to the open house.

Bottom, another view of the first day of school in Vernonia at one of the street crossings. Let this be a reminder to slow down and watch for children now that schools are back in session and children are walking to and from area schools.