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April 20, 2007
News Home

Events

Calendar Listings
Athletics Art Gallery
Performance Hall

YC Publications

Class Schedule (PDF)
College Catalog The
Rough Writer Viewbook
(PDF) YC Today (PDF)

YC Multimedia

YC Radio Hour YC
Commercials

News Media

Contacts News Release
Archive YC Facts

Faculty & Staff

OPI Contacts OPI FAQ
Request Marketing
Materials Request a
Press Release Request
a Web Highlight

Announcements

Avian Flu Pandemic

Last Updated: 3/12/2007 2:46:05 PM

Building Green for Less Green

"Green" home built by Residential Building Technology students and Prescott Habitat for Humanity.

Even if you're lucky enough to find your dream home with an affordable mortgage, Arizonans know that as the mercury rises so will your utility bills.

Recently Yavapai College's Residential Building Technology (RBT) program teamed up with Habitat for Humanity to construct a 1,189 square foot energy-efficient home for $55 a square foot – more than 70 percent less than the median Prescott home price of $273,826.

Students built the home in two semesters using select energy features, including a solar water heater, all ducts located in conditioned space, unvented attic with cathedralized spray-foam insulation, low-e argon-filled windows, ENERGY STAR kitchen appliances and an extremely tight building envelope.

With utility costs often running neck-in-neck with monthly mortgage payments, this partnership has provided a home and an affordable future for its new family.

The Habitat house was recently awarded a 2007 EnergyValue Housing Award from the National Association of Home Builders Research Center, the nation's premiere energy efficiency award honoring builders who voluntarily incorporate energy efficiency into the design, construction and marketing of new homes.

"If you want to learn how to build houses the right way based on cutting edge technologies and current building science principles, this is the place to be," said Tony Grahame, director of the program.

For 10 years now, Yavapai College's RBT program has focused on teaching students to construct green homes. As one of the most progressive residential construction programs in the country, the RBT combines classroom instruction with practical, hands-on skills training. Typically, 12-15 students construct a house in two to three semesters.

"Yavapai College's program is unique in that not a lot of two or four-year college's have building programs that actually build a house as part of their curriculum," said recent RBT alumnus Rich Peterson. "An award like this is significant because we're being compared to all the builders across the country."

The program also earned a second 2007 Gold EnergyValue Housing Award in the custom home category for successfully integrating resource-efficient design and quality construction. Notable features of the 3,200-square-foot home include a 2kW photovoltaic system, solar water heating, high-efficiency HVAC with ducts located in conditioned space, 100 percent fluorescent lighting, high-performance low-e windows and an extremely tight building envelope.

In fact, program's last four homes have earned prestigious awards from the National Association of Home Builders Research Center, including
• 2006 Single Family Research Project - Custom Home
• 2005 Energy Value Housing Award - Custom Home/moderate climate
• 2004 Green Building Project of the Year - Custom Home

Grahame explained that it's all about making good choices in terms of materials, technology and systems. "We're

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