

Their green devotion is admirable

By John Stearns business editor, / *The Bulletin*

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Some people probably question the money Tom Elliott and Barbara Scott are spending to create the greenest home possible in Bend — almost \$270,000 before construction has even begun. The Bulletin has been chronicling their mission in occasional stories since October 2009, most recently on Monday, when they discussed the challenges and costs of their project.

But they're not giving up. They're passionate about minimizing their environmental impact in ways few of us would ever consider. They're also sharing what they're learning so consumers, builders and others doing green building or remodeling won't have to spend as much time and money for the same results.

I applaud the couple for following their passion and doing the heavy lifting to make it easier for others to live greener, or go so far as to build a home to Living Building Challenge standards, as Elliott and Scott are doing. The LBC is "widely regarded as the world's most rigorous green building performance standard," according to the International Living Building Institute. Requirements include on-site power generation, water collection and waste-water treatment.

This is way more than double-pane windows and good insulation. Elliott and Scott are aiming for a whole new way of building and living.

Not one home in the U.S. has been certified as meeting LBC guidelines, but some are under construction or have been built and will be evaluated against myriad criteria. Certification follows a year of data collection on the home.

Quite simply, Elliott and Scott are paying to break new ground on things that include figuring out which building materials are toxin-free, which ones are transported the least distance to reduce carbon footprints and much more.

It's been difficult to find materials meeting LBC criteria, "which leads me to believe that our conventional building practices are seriously compromised in terms of what we're doing to the inside environment that we live in," Elliott said. "There's a certain craziness to it," he added of our building and consumption habits.

"We don't expect that what we're doing is going to change the world," that everyone's going to build an LBC home, he said. But bit by bit, differences are made. For example, he's finding tradespeople interested to learn products they regularly install in homes and offices contain ingredients like formaldehyde, classified by the International Agency for Research on Cancer as carcinogenic to humans. Change starts with awareness.

Also, tradespeople on this project, for example, might help a customer find stone quarried locally that's as good as stone from Italy, which reduces the impact associated with long-distance transportation while employing local workers.

As more consumers and builders start demanding truly green products, markets will respond. Manufacturers will learn to have answers when they're asked to verify their products' ingredients and where they're made. Ideally, healthier products and systems

emerge, and impacts on people and the planet are reduced.

Mary Davidge, a green building consultant and owner of Mary Davidge Associates in Los Gatos, Calif., worked on a home for an unidentified Bay Area real estate executive who just moved into a home built to LBC standards. Challenges were significant, she said, but “looking back now ... we found things that were so fantastic,” including local manufacturers of quality products the building team never knew existed.

“This is going to get easier as long as (building and design) teams are willing to share information through the collaborative process,” she said.

The Bend team is doing its part. Scott and the project’s architect have begun presentations to share findings with interested parties. Elliott has considered an online database or how-to guide.

Sharing knowledge is important so more people can make a difference. “In a way, it’s a form of philanthropy,” Elliott said of what has become their “cause.”

The couple is sensitive to the cost of their project, known as “Desert Rain,” in these hard times, but give them credit for trying to make a difference and perhaps inspire others to do the same. For project questions or comments, e-mail them at desertrainhouse@gmail.com.

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