

Habitat goes platinum

Nonprofit's Bend arm is building a house designed to achieve highest level of LEED certification

By Kate Ramsayer / *The Bulletin*

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With solar panels, cement floors with radiant heating, low volatile organic compound paint and permeable pavers in the driveway and walkway, a home being built in northeast Bend is designed to be the first LEED Platinum Habitat for Humanity Home in Bend.

While the Bend Area Habitat for Humanity has been building green and energy-efficient features into homes since 2007, the LEED certification is a chance to do something a little bigger, said Robin Cooper, community outreach manager for the organization and owner of a Habitat home.

“We thought that it might engage some new support for us locally, and possibly even beyond our community,” she said.

Bend Area Habitat is one of only a handful nationwide that is building a LEED home. LEED is a certification system which assigns points for different environmentally friendly features, resulting in different levels of certification. Platinum is the highest level.

And building green — with energy-efficient appliances, compact fluorescent lights and tight envelopes on homes so that warm air doesn't escape during the winter, or cool air during the summer — saves money for the families who move into Habitat houses.

“Building more efficient and sustainable, the families are showing significantly lower rates on utility costs,” Cooper said, “It is an incredible benefit for families.”

Cooper's home isn't LEED certified, but has other energy-efficiency certifications for its solar panels, heating system and more. And these last few months, for example, her power bill has been under \$10, while the gas bill, which provides heat, has been under \$45, she said.



Andy Tullis / The Bulletin

Robin Cooper, community outreach manager for Bend Area Habitat for Humanity, talks about the Bend nonprofit's first home designed to achieve LEED Platinum certification. The energy-efficient features of the house, which is being built on Northeast Spring Water Place in Bend, will reduce costs for the family that lives in it.



The Cascadia Green Building Council is partnering with Habitat for Humanity for the first LEED home in Bend, said Kelley Beamer, advocacy and outreach manager with the organization's Portland office.

Cascadia is a branch of the national nonprofit Green Building Council, which runs the LEED certification program.

"We see building as an opportunity to address social justice," Beamer said. "And with the Habitat situation, their mission is to build simple, decent and affordable, and we really believe that involves sustainable and healthy. ... It's healthier for the occupants, and ultimately, when you're employing a lot of green building techniques, you also are bringing down the cost."

And there are ways to keep the cost of green building down, especially for an organization like Habitat for Humanity, she said, including buying solar panels and, through the state Business Energy Tax Credit, selling tax credits to companies that can use them.

In addition, builders and contractors who are hoping to gain experience working on green homes and get additional professional certification in the green field can volunteer to help out with the Habitat project.

"It does take that effort, and it's sort of a labor of love for all the volunteers helping shepherd this through," Beamer said.

Bend Area Habitat has built Earth Advantage-certified homes previously, Cooper said, but those certifications are more regional, and focus on energy efficiency. LEED is an international program, she said, and the builders are taking a look at ways to incorporate features like stormwater management, and being diligent in choosing the nontoxic and often recycled materials that go into the home.

Everyone should have access to healthy, energy-efficient and affordable homes, Beamer said, and the partners involved in this project are hoping to use the house now under construction as a model.

"For both Cascadia and Bend Area Habitat, hopefully this is a pilot that becomes a protocol, so that all the future homes can seek LEED certification," Beamer said.

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