



Submitted photos/Doreen Wynja

In Pat Britton's open-plan home, the kitchen flows into the living room. Large windows let in plenty of light; they're well-insulated to keep out cold air.

Energy-efficient home for the future

By STARLA POINTER
Of the News-Register

November's electricity bill — the first one Pat Britton paid after moving into her new, energy efficient home — was \$40. That's about one-fourth what she spent on electricity a year ago in her slightly larger rental house, built in 1986.

"And I can stand by the windows here and not feel the cold," she said. "I love it!"

Cellar Ridge Custom Homes made Britton's new 1,287-square-foot cottage as green as possible.

Along with the cold-blocking windows, it features all sorts of green materials and techniques. "We try to pull out all the stops on energy efficiency," said John Mead, co-owner of the McMinnville firm.

For instance, Cellar Ridge used double-wall construction, with two exterior walls separated by an air space. The method is much more energy-efficient than single wall,

he said. Even when single-wall is well-insulated, he said, the studs still conduct heat directly from inside to outside.

And while building two walls uses more studs, they can be smaller, so the total amount of wood — and the cost — is about the same, he said.

Building energy efficient homes is a balancing act, Mead said. Builders must consider the extra cost of some — but certainly not all — materials and techniques and work within a homeowner's budget.

"It has to look nice and work for them, too," he said. "Houses that are loved are cared for, so they last."

Some aspects of green building do cost more, he said. But "it's a myth that green is more expensive." Energy efficiency might add 10 percent to the original cost, he said, but that cost begins to be returned immediately in



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The small cottage is situated to take advantage of sunlight and scenic views.

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the form of lower utility bills.

The \$40 November electric bill only confirmed what Britton already knew: That she'd made the right choice for her future.

She had her new house built next to the homes of friends who will provide just the right amount of companionship. They can keep an eye on one another, but maintain privacy and independence, she said.

"I'm thinking of the future," Britton said. "I can't afford assisted living, so I want to build a place I can live in as long as possible."

Britton began thinking about future living accommodations many years ago, not for herself, but for her developmentally disabled son, Peter Vyas. At the time, he still lived with her. But what would happen, she wondered, when she could no longer care for him?

She joined other parents of children with disabilities who had the same concerns. Together, they spearheaded construction of an apartment complex on Eighth Street that gives their adult children independence with some structure.

"It's proved to be wonderful for Peter," she said.

So two years ago, she and some of

the other parents decided to look into building homes that would give them the same mix of structure and independence. They thought about sharing one space, but decided they wanted the privacy of separate dwellings.

They also wanted energy efficiency, so they approached Cellar Ridge.

Before the first shovel dug into the ground or the first nail was struck, Britton spent hours talking with house designer Matt Daby. "I talked to him a lot about what I wanted, what I needed, what I liked in my other house," she said.

Daby translated her list into a design, which Cellar Ridge builders translated into a structure with which she is delighted.

"I'm really proud of the way it's turned out," she said. "It's functional for me and would be suitable for a couple, as well."

With main rooms that flow one into another, her small home feels light and airy. There are plenty of windows facing south and west in the living/dining/kitchen area, with views of the flora and fauna of nearby Cozine Creek.

The kitchen is compact, but doesn't seem tight because it's open to the rest of the house. It features custom cabinetry and touches such as pull-out drawers in the pantry, to make it easy to find ingredients. The black Kenmore appliances are Energy Star rated. The countertops appear to be high-end, but



are really laminate; the tile backsplash adds color.

Off the dining room, a reading nook overlooks the covered deck where chickadees caucus. The window seat's cushion is actually a twin-bed mattress, so the nook can double as a guest bed, if necessary.

The electric furnace maintains an even 68 degrees during the day, 64 at night. Britton also can turn on her gas fireplace.

Stranded bamboo flooring gives a wood floor look and feel at an affordable price. Walls are painted with no-VOC paints in colors such as "Foxy," a

soft terra cotta red. "Lisa Stonebridge helped me with the colors," she said, noting that she seems to be choosing bolder colors each time she paints.

There's an indoor laundry room, and extra storage in the 1 1/2 car garage. Not that she needs extra storage, of course. "I got rid of a lot of stuff," she said. "I winnowed in earnest."

The home includes two bedrooms, both with bathrooms. While the guest bath includes a tub, the master features an ADA-accessible shower — not because Britton needs it, but because she might someday.

She plans to stay in this house. 🌿

Right: **Pat Britton reads in the nook, which can double as a guest bedroom. The nook, which offers views of chickadees feeding on the covered deck, is one of her favorite places in her new home.**

Upper right: **In the master bedroom, the headboard abuts a bump-out wall that adds architectural interest and makes room for two small windows for extra light.**

Submitted photo
Doreen Wynja



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OF ENVIRONMENTAL
HARM STACKING UP,
MAYBE IT'S TIME
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