

Builders honored for energy efficiency

By GILLIAN POMPLUN

Rural Soldiers Grove resident Dan Johnson and his business partner David Romary of Viroqua were awarded the Focus on Energy (FOE) 'Energy Excellence Award' recently for their work on two energy efficient homes in the Driftless Region. The two own and operate the Driftless HomeWrights business.

The award was given because the two homes — one in rural Soldiers Grove, and the other in rural Viroqua — were identified by rigorous testing as two of the five most energy efficient homes built in the State of Wisconsin in 2021. The testing and certification was done by FOE's 'New Home Certification Program.'

"Our program has certified over 45,000 homes in the 14 years of our existence, and Driftless HomeWright's homes are often at the top of the list," program manager Andy Kuc told those assembled. "Every year at the conference FOE holds to train builders in energy efficient methods, Dan and David can be seen selflessly sharing their techniques with other builders — you don't see that kind of thing in business very often."

David Romary addressed the group present for the award.

"When people ask why we build these kinds of homes, I explain that 40 percent of the emissions that cause global

warming come from the heating and cooling of homes," Romary said. "And, over the course of the life of a home, 90 percent of its cost comes from paying to heat and cool it."

Johnson said that he can't wait to build more of these kinds of homes. And he said, "if you don't believe in global warming, then do it because it will save you lots of money."

Romary told the story of Sonya Newenhouse, the owner of one of the first energy efficient homes built by Driftless HomeWrights in Viroqua.

"Sonya decided that the test of her home would be to see if she could avoid turning on the heat for the entire first winter," Romary said.

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DAN JOHNSON, left, and David Romary, right, of Driftless HomeWrights are shown with their 'Energy Excellence Award,' along with Matt Bromley of Focus on Energy.

Homeowners appreciate comfort

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"Sonya reported that the lowest temperature they'd had that winter was 56 degrees, and that the house would warm right up again once the sun had risen."

Romary said that energy efficient homes can be built at a very competitive price. He said that generally, the cost of building one of these homes is about \$230 per square foot.

"Any good builder can build an energy efficient home," Romary said. "They just have to want to do it."

Dan Johnson addressed the group next.

"It's fantastic to receive this award," Johnson said. "A lot of the work we do to achieve this level of energy efficiency is dark and dirty," Johnson observed. "But the result is super insulated walls and attics that save energy and save money."

Johnson said that the company's success owes a lot to the quality of the subcontractors that they work with, and especially to the homeowners who make the choice to pursue energy efficiency.

"Our planet is in trouble," Johnson said. "I first began to learn about climate change and the problems that would be associated with it 30 years ago - what Driftless HomeWrights does is to go beyond talk to provide solutions. We're not asking people to give anything up - we're asking people to be more comfortable."

Alicia Leinberger of Ethos Green Energy was the subcontractor that installed the 10-kilowatt solar electric system for the Prejean's house in rural Viroqua.

"This house is free from the fluctuations of the global energy markets," Leinberger said. "The Prejeans are pioneers, and will help to inspire others."

Leinberger also pointed out that the recently enacted federal Inflation Reduction Act will financially help a lot more people to pursue more energy efficient homes.

Two homes

The two homes for which Driftless Homewrights received awards are owned by Gordon and June Prejean of rural Viroqua, and Dr. Joel Charles and Dr. Phoebe Devitt of rural Soldiers Grove.

"I am thankful to David and Dan for building our house," Gordon Prejean said. "Their company's promotional materials don't even come close to portraying the passion the two have for their work."

Prejean said that it was their attention to the details that made the home so tight and energy efficient. He said the result was a very comfortable house with no need for back-up fuel.

"Driftless HomeWrights does beautiful work," June Prejean said. "I feel safe, solid and secure in my home."

Dr. Joel Charles lives in the Trout Creek Watershed with his wife Dr. Phoebe De-

vitt, and their two children.

"I feel very lucky to have a comfortable home that is cheap to run and healthy to live in," Charles said. "Houses built like ours should not be the exception, but rather, should be the rule."

Charles pointed out that gas appliances can make children 40 percent more likely to develop asthma. He also said that there is evidence that solar systems that are connected to the electrical power grid help to level out the peaks and valleys in demand. He pointed out that on a hot, sunny day, private solar systems will produce more excess electricity than is needed by the homeowner at the same time as the grid can become stressed with people cooling their homes.

"We have a housing shortage in the United States and in the State of Wisconsin," Charles pointed out. "What is crucial is to build the new housing needed to be energy efficient using Focus on Energy funding, and updating our building codes to reduce systematic barriers to increasing the energy efficiency of both our existing and future housing stock."

Charles said that the task in front of us is to replicate the success of houses like the two built by Driftless HomeWrights "by an order of magnitude."

Focus on Energy

Matt Bromley of FOE spoke to the group about the history of the organization. Included in the group gathered to mark the occasion were Wisconsin State Representative Loren Oldenburg and Tim Hundt of U.S. Congressman Ron Kind's office.

"Focus on Energy was created 20 years ago by an act of the legislature and the signature of the governor," Bromley said. "The program is funded by utility rate payers throughout the state."

Hundt pointed out that recent prices for energy is a reminder to all of us that energy is a world market. He said that this is why it was crucial that Congress pass the Inflation Reduction Act to put the United States on a



fortable.

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GORDON AND JUNE Prejean speak to the group assembled for the award presentation, expressing their appreciation for the work of Driftless HomeWrights, and their enjoyment of the comfort of their home.

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Wanted

Wanted

Wanted: Old gas pumps, oil & gas related items. Soda, food, grocery signs. Automotive related signs & items.