
Even existings homes can take advantage of energy-efficient features

By Kim Hughes

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When Habitat for Humanity of Martin County unveiled its first green home in East Stuart earlier this month, it demonstrated that being environmentally sustainable doesn't have to break the bank.

The home, which belongs to Leo Rodriguez, is being certified by the Florida Green Building Coalition and is the first of three green homes to be built by Habitat.

Incorporating green features into a new home about a decade ago could carry a hefty price tag. But with the passage of time, increased demand from consumers and the availability of new materials, costs have decreased considerably.

Kyle Abney, principal of Abney + Abney Green Solutions, tries to avoid the word "cost" when discussing changes to make a home greener. He prefers the word "investment," because green features often save money with their energy efficiency.

"If you invest in something that's going to pay you back, that's the true definition of an investment," Abney said.

When building green, planning is essential — the earlier, the better, Abney said. Letting your builder, architect and subcontractors know your wishes in advance often means there is little or no premium for that green addition, he said.

If you're not building, you can make low-cost changes to your current home.

Review your home's insulation and add more if needed. Install a programmable thermostat. Replace incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescent bulbs. Add insulation around your hot water heater or, when it requires replacement, install an "on demand" version. Adjust sprinklers so that sidewalks and other hard surfaces aren't being watered.

Abney said that with the abundance of information and resources available today, more consumers will see the advantages of going green.

"If Habitat for Humanity can do it, anyone can do it," Abney said.



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