

THE GREEN HOUSE COUPLE *BY GREG GARNER, January 26, 2011*

Not many people would invest \$124,000 to remodel a 53-year-old, 1,300-square-foot house and end up with a dual platinum certified green home.

But Boyd Gunsalus and his wife, Beth Kacvinski, never looked back after they made the decision to convert their home of 23 years and go as green as they could. Their All-American Avenue home in Palm City was the first in Florida to receive platinum certification from both the U.S. Green Building Council and the Florida Green Building Coalition.

To receive certification the homeowner must present evidence of the green efforts, which are then evaluated and given points toward the total score. Gunsalus and Kacvinski had a good jump on certification as they enclosed a garage and used existing walls so the home's footprint did not increase. Holes were bored into the existing block wall and Icynene expanding insulation was pumped inside.

The couple and their children have always had a simple home life. In a "team effort" they shared one bathroom, one television, one telephone and one computer. When the children started college, the parents began to do their homework to make the conversion to green.

"It was all pretty exciting," says Beth. "It's a new home in an old shell. It wasn't a difficult process. We had a good contractor and we got what we wanted."

Gunsalus and Kacvinski, both employees of the South Florida Water Management District, literally practice what they preach. All of the appliances in the remodeled home have the highest energy efficiency rating – washer, dryer, air conditioner and refrigerator.

Stripping out the vinyl floor and refinishing the original terrazzo scored points in the certification process. And it was the same for the very expensive impact resistant windows, which do not require shutters.

The carport was closed in with walls made of green block Styrofoam and poured concrete. Gunsalus says the house is now like a thermos, keeping the cold and heat out. The home is sealed up "very tight." But much of the year the front windows and rear French doors are left open for a cross-ventilating breeze that cools the house with more healthful fresh air.

The outside of the home was replaced with cement-based Hardy plank made from recycled material. Because it is fireproof, it scored points for certification and also with the couple's insurance company. Gunsalus says the premium was cut by \$3,000 when they added the metal roof, additional hurricane straps, impact windows, and Hardy plank.

The couple received the maximum federal tax credits for their AC system, solar cells on the roof, solar water heater, insulation and Energy Star appliances. The solar cells and water heater cost \$30,000. Gunsalus says the total federal tax credit was \$12,500 and the family is also eligible for a state rebate of \$12,800, which would bring the total cost for the systems to less than \$4,000.

They have also been receiving credit from Florida Power & Light for the power generated by the solar cells. And more money is saved by growing herbs and vegetables in a backyard garden, which can be watered from a well at the side of the house.

"We wanted to go as green as we could," says Gunsalus. "We had done our homework. They pushed us to go green and we went along with what they suggested."

"They are a simple couple," says Kyle Abney, a green planner who worked with the couple. "Lifestyle has a lot to do with it. Going green was part of their DNA."

Name: Boyd Gunsalus and Beth Kacvinski (see below)
Family: Son, Niles, 23; daughter, Hannah, 21

How and when did you start your “green” awakening? “It was in the mid-’80s before green was known as green,” Gunsalus says. “Beth realized we needed to do what we could do to reduce our footprint. We started out with recycling and composting. We took our kids camping and did our own beach cleanups. We tried to ground them to the real environment and let them realize that there is more to the world than the materialistic things we see all the time.”

What do you think are the most effective things we can do to conserve resources? “If everyone reduced their overall consumption, it would go a long way toward the big picture of energy efficiency,” Gunsalus says. “Anytime we can capture passive energy such as solar, wind, thermal or water we should take advantage of it if we can.”

