

**Newspaper:** Boone County Recorder  
**Column Title:** Community Enviro-Line  
**Column Article Title:** Sustainable Structures: Surprisingly Interesting  
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**Date:** October 2008

"I'm not going to stand here and blow smoke."

That's Dennis Beckett, representing the Energy Pros, Inc. and he is speaking to me and a group of Kentucky environmental educators about greening the construction of new homes. He is awesomely honest and endearingly unadorned in his approach to public speaking and though I don't own a house and do not plan on building one anytime soon, I find myself intrigued by Dennis's discussion.

"We could cut energy use in Kentucky right now by fifteen to sixteen percent without blinking an eye but it's still not happening," he imparts, shaking his head. He truly believes in environmentally preferable building practices. He knows that there has been a surge in interest in green building because of energy costs but he is convinced that only a small fraction of new homeowners are making ecological choices. "Folks building new homes may pick out the colors and countertops but they don't have any say in the inner workings of their house. It's not right."

It doesn't sound right to me, either. I agree when he calls for increased education about green building to anyone interested in building or buying a building.

"In the industry in western Kentucky, the attitude was that when energy prices get to the point when people have decide whether they want to be warm tonight or drive their car tomorrow, then that is the time to start educating the public about greener homes. It shouldn't have to be that way. There are ways to make homes energy efficient that won't increase the cost of the home by three or four thousand dollars and you get that back in the first year."

Inspired by Dennis's persuasive speech, I called Shawn Hesse, the Chair of the Cincinnati Regional Chapter of the US Green Building Council. He doesn't use the same colorful language but he, too, is passionate about pro-planetary construction and he agrees with Dennis's mortgage assessment. "Going green doesn't have to cost extra," he explains. "It could be a zero to two percent increase in up-front costs but the energy savings over the life of a project could be substantial."

Naturally, I care about cash but Shawn really got my attention when he explained that thirty percent of all energy use in the US goes towards temperature control in buildings. "If people are concerned about their impact on the environment, the efficiency of our buildings has a big impact."

I know that I am in no place to be looking into homeownership, but I have to ask how I'd get started greening my dream home. Shawn responds happily, pointing me to <http://usgbc.org/chapters/cincinnati>, his organization's website, or to the local chapter administrator Amy Ostigny at 513-403-0301 or [aostigny@bizcinci.rr.com](mailto:aostigny@bizcinci.rr.com). "There are lots of resources available," he chirps, from guidelines for green residential remodeling to listings of environmentally-certified buildings in our area to complete ecological information on fashioning such a structure yourself. He sounds gleeful when he tells me that, "In terms of green building, interest is growing."

I'm not blowing smoke when I say that in terms of green building in my life, my interest happens to be growing, too.

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