

IN THE NEWS

'Net Zero' homes ready to go mainstream

Reid's Heritage Homes launches first handful of homes that generate as much energy as they use

DIANNE DANIEL
Special to Postmedia Network

Move over dishwashers, central vac and basement bathrooms, there's a new concept in home "rough-ins" launching in Ontario.

By the end of 2016, all new single family developments brought to market by Reid's Heritage Homes should be Net Zero ready, says director of innovation Jennifer Weatherston.

"We've got Net Zero figured out," said Weatherston, noting that that goal is to give homebuyers the option to upgrade to an advanced energy-saving package.

"We tried to keep it as simple as possible so it could be repeated," she said.

One of five builders involved in a national demonstration project aimed at making Net Zero Energy homes — homes that produce as much energy as they use on an annual basis — fully accessible and affordable to all Canadians, Reid's Heritage Homes recently launched its first handful of Net Zero homes in Westminster Woods in Guelph, Ont.

The discovery home is now open for viewing, a second is ready for purchase at \$525,000, a third is in the ground, and the final two are expected to start construction by the end of October.

All five feature an advanced, energy-efficient envelope that includes thicker wall assemblies, bumped up insulation, triple pane windows, an innovative home comfort system that heats or cools on demand, LED lights and a wide range of leading-edge technologies intended to significantly lower energy costs.

The "rough-in" concept applies to the recommended rooftop solar system. Though the discovery home is already generating power from a 33-panel photovoltaic rooftop system supplied by Bluewater Energy, the remaining four will be "solar-ready," including the conduit from the attic to the basement, an extra meter base and a 60-amp disconnect.

"Basically we're providing everything except the solar panels on the roof because that's half, if not a little more, of the cost to go to Net Zero," she said, noting that consumers will be

free to price and source their own panels, and that energy bills will be significantly less even without the solar offset.

Whereas 54 per cent of the energy consumed by a code-built home goes to heating and cooling, the heating and cooling costs of a Net Zero home are so insignificant that 54 per cent of the energy consumed actually goes to how you live, she added. So the only one who doesn't stand to benefit from a Net Zero home is the 'energy piggy'.

"If you leave your lights on 24/7 and flat screens on in every room when nobody's using them, you're going to exceed the energy you're producing," said Weatherston. "But in theory, these homes do produce as much as the average consumer would consume."

Beyond the obvious benefit of energy savings, Net Zero homes also raise the comfort bar, she adds.

Air quality is better thanks to a fresh air ventilation system from VanEE that acts as the lungs of the home; noise is reduced due to the advanced insulation and air barrier system provided by Owens Corning; and, overall comfort is

enhanced using heating and cooling technology from Mitsubishi Electric, Dettson Industries and Lennox to ensure a steady climate throughout all levels of a home.

"Consumers need to understand that Net Zero is an improvement to your overall home," said Weatherston, citing a comment from Canadian Home Builders' Association (CHBA) first vice-president Bob Finnigan who remarked: "Everybody loves their home but a Net Zero home loves you back."

"This initiative isn't just about energy savings," said Weatherston. "It's about improving your quality of life while you're in your home."

In addition to the national demonstration project, Reid's Heritage Homes is also a member of the CHBA official Net Zero Energy Housing Council and is enthusiastically sharing its data and process details with others to encourage more builders to bring Net Zero mainstream. "It just makes better homes for everyone," she said.

For a complete list of the technologies and products used by Reid's Heritage Homes to achieve Net Zero, visit livenetzero.com.



A 'discovery home' is now open for viewing and is generating power from a 33-panel photovoltaic rooftop system.



Ribbon-cutting VIPs are Blake Seeberger, senior v-p, Reid's Heritage Homes; Bob Finnigan, CHBA; Andy Goyda, Owens Corning Canada; Tim Blevins, President, Reid's Heritage Homes; Cam Guthrie, Mayor, City of Guelph; Scott Reid, President, Reid's Heritage Properties; Ric McFadden, Owens Corning Canada; Tony Vannelli, University of Guelph.