

THE TRUE MEANING OF GREEN-BUILD

By Greg Mantell-Hecathorn, President of Mantell-Hecathorn Builders, Inc.

“Green” and “sustainability” are just two words in the green-build jargon that have been abused over several years. What is sustainability? What does green-build mean? Greg Mantell-Hecathorn, a leading expert on the subject, clears up the confusion for you.

High performance green homes and remodels require a new and comprehensive knowledge of sustainable building science and the ability to understand the home as a total system. Building as usual no longer is sufficient. The builder, architect and subcontractors have to understand the new installation methods and products required to certify a home. Both consumers and builders need to understand the value of having a home certified by an independent third party rater, as that process allows the outside verification and analysis of a home's green features, including energy-efficiency and the related utility cost savings.

There are several national green building programs that are available in the Durango area. The Energy Star Program for New Homes focuses on measuring energy-efficiency of new construction. A rater will be able to estimate the utility cost savings to be anticipated over a standard home by conducting blower door and duct blaster tests, and measuring the efficiency of heating and cooling systems. Choosing to build or buy a home certified by a national green-building program such as the National Association of Homebuilders (NAHB) Green Program, or the USGBC LEED for Homes program allows a consumer to compare a home's more comprehensive green features. There are many options

to choose from in such categories as energy efficiency, resource conservation, indoor air quality, site orientation, and water conservation.

The NAHB Green program offers four levels of certification. Bronze is the entry level and offers the minimum requirement of energy efficiency. The other levels of Silver, Gold and Emerald offer increased benefits in sustainable design, comfort and savings. The NAHB is a more user-friendly program, costs a little less to certify, and is designed to help mainstream homebuilders incorporate green building principles into homes without driving up the cost significantly yet certifies the level of green features for home-buyers.

The USGBC LEED for Homes Program offers 4 levels of certification: Certified, Silver, Gold, and Platinum. The LEED certification process is a bit more layered than NAHB, requires more verifiable documentation and lifecycle analysis. LEED provides national consistency in defining a green home, and assures homebuyers of the quality of their purchase.

Builders and architects who have received accreditation as NAHB Certified Green Professionals have received a basic level of sustainable building information. The LEED AP (Accredited Professional) program is more rigorous and demanding. Building science seminars and webinars put on by industry experts are an important source of continuing education in the field. Sustainable design and construction requires a more collaborative team

approach among all the principals to achieve the desired green certification result. Green program certification requirements lay the groundwork for success, but the consumer needs to ask for references, third party reviews and ask pertinent questions about the professional's knowledge of green building. Some websites that can provide further information, and help to educate both consumers and professionals are:

Energy Star Program
www.energystar.gov
LEED for Homes
www.usgbc.org
NAHB Green Program
www.nahbgreen.org

Greg Mantell-Hecathorn is the President of the Homebuilders Association of Southwest Colorado, and creator of the Durango Sustainable Building Education Program, a non-profit educational program of free or low-cost events open to the building trades and related industries, and the general public.

He is also President of Mantell-Hecathorn Builders, Inc. and has been building and designing custom homes and renovations for over 34 years. Last year Mantell-Hecathorn Builders was recognized by Built Green Colorado as the 2008 Custom Home Builder of the Year.