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Energy-efficient home on display in Claverack

By Tom Casey
Hudson-Catskill Newspapers

Published:
Monday, November 14, 2011 2:08 AM EST

CLAVERRACK — Driving along Millbrook Road in Claverack you might not notice it at first, but within what seems like only thick forest resides one of the more unique homes in the country.

Up a long and winding driveway sits the Hudson Passive Project, an energy efficient home that was the first in New York to receive passive house certification from the Passive House Institute US.

On Sunday, the home participated in the "International Passive House Days" open house, allowing interested parties the chance to see what a passive house can look like as well as learn what makes it so efficient.

"This is the second annual event that we've done," said Carly Cresh, spokesperson for the Dennis Wedlick Architect LLC, who designed the home. "It has been incredible, last year when we did it there was nothing in here, now it's furnished and people can see what a home like this can look like ... I can't believe how many people are here."

Throughout the day as many as 50 people at a time toured the 1,650-square-foot home completed by the Chatham-based Bill Stratton Building Company.

Stratton is currently living in the home with his wife and praised the house's efficiency; it's able to reduce energy consumption by 90 percent and is one of the most energy efficient homes in the country.

"We haven't had to use the heat yet this year," said Stratton. "We're expecting to spend \$600 a year for everything — all utilities."

The home is superinsulated to prevent the transfer of heat outside. The



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south side of the building is made up of a wall of windows to retain solar heat, and a heat recovery ventilator helps recover heat from the warmed air inside and transfer it to the new air coming in from the outside. In the summer it utilizes the same system but with cold air.

The houses circulation system uses a filter to keep the air fresh, which Gresch said can also help with people who have asthma and allergies.

"One family who moved into a passive home had a son with Asthma who hasn't had any problems since moving into the house, it's amazing," she said.

The home also does not have a hot water tank, water is heated using an electronic box with temperature controls. The kitchen, bathrooms and washer and dryer are all placed in the center of the house so that water travels through less amount of pipes.

Gresch said, however, the style in which the Hudson Passive Project was built is not the only style a passive house can be built.

"It doesn't have to have the bathrooms all together, it can have a basement," said Gresch. "You can get what you want and its up to architects and building scientists and engineers come up with a plan to make it possible."

In Europe, passive homes are becoming more and more common, Gresch said.

By 2020, all new buildings in Europe will have to meet passive home standards for energy efficiency. In the United States, the homes are still a rare commodity; however, interest is beginning to grow.

"Last year we were the only one in New York that was Passive home certified," said Gresch. "This year I think there are close to 10, it's such a good feeling; builders architects have caught on and seen the importance of this kind of building."

Stratton also said the market for passive homes is growing and his company has already been in conversations to construct more passive houses in Columbia County and throughout the Hudson Valley.

"There are all sorts of exciting conversations happening now," said Stratton. "I think people are starting to think differently on all levels — personal expenditures and energy consumption — so the time is right for people to start considering these types of homes."

Stratton said he thinks passive homes will become much more common down the road and could become the main focus for his business. "This won't be an abstract thing; I think within the next five years ... I could say very quickly we can focus only on passive projects."

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