

SITE STORY



One lean, green accessible machine

When Dennis and Melissa Radovic decided to move to a new home, they knew it would have to be an accessible one: Dennis gets around in a wheelchair because of his multiple sclerosis. So they toured an accessible home built by Durham Custom Homes and they did their research. "We had the accessibility information," says Melissa, "and we thought, 'We can do this.'"

They approached Victor Fiume, general manager of Durham Custom Homes, about building a house that was not only fully accessible, but also met the highest standards of environmental efficiency. They could not have chosen a more appropriate builder.

Until recently, the highest standard for energy and environmental efficiency in homes was Energy Star, but in summer 2008, an even higher standard was introduced: GreenHouse certification. To be GreenHouse certified, houses must meet stringent requirements for use of energy, water, air and materials. Durham Custom Homes, a family run business for nearly 60 years, was the first Canadian builder to enroll in the GreenHouse program and, in breaking the ground for the Radovics' home, also the first to begin construction on a fully accessible GreenHouse home.

It's no surprise, then, that EnerQuality Corporation, which oversees the Energy Star and GreenHouse programs, awarded Durham Custom Homes both the Energy

Star Builder of the Year and GreenHouse Builder of the Year awards in 2008. As well, it named Fiume Leader of the Year.

Fiume says this was not the company's first accessible home; it's built three others in the Kingsway Forest subdivision. But it's the first that's built to the new GreenHouse standards.

At first glance, the Radovics' attractive Oshawa bungalow looks a lot like the other homes in the neighbourhood, but there are several features that make it distinct, including a three-stop elevator. The master bathroom was designed with a barrier-free shower stall, comfort-height toilet and lowered cabinets. The galley kitchen is extra wide, with accessible-height counters, pull-out drawers in the pantry instead of shelves, and a handy pull-out shelf under the oven. Throughout the house there are door levers instead of knobs, wide doorways and corridors, and several other modifications.

Fiume says these special features don't come cheap. "To make a house accessible adds about 20% to the cost," he says. But this aspect is not a money-maker for the builder. "We don't believe it's appropriate to profit from someone's disability, so we do all the accessibility features at cost."

Meeting Energy Star requirements includes such features as standard heat recovery ventilator, on-demand (tankless) hot water heater, high-efficiency furnace with dual stage burner and DC

blower motor, exterior air barrier between the brick/siding and walls, sealed heating ducts and pipes, and dedicated return-air system.

Meeting GreenHouse-certified construction standards means incorporating additional requirements, to achieve energy efficiency with environmental responsibility. In a nutshell, builders must reduce the amount of wood they use to build the home, use products that have been diverted from landfill, reduce indoor water consumption by 25%, reduce or eliminate indoor air contaminants, and reduce landfill waste generated by the construction process by 25%. Fiume says Durham Custom Homes has met these standards and even exceeded some of them; the waste diversion on this home was closer to 50%.

During a ceremony for the official opening of the house on April 2, Durham Custom Homes was presented with a certificate of recognition by Suzanne Elston, senior environmental co-ordinator for the city of Oshawa, in her role as municipal energy conservation officer and on behalf of the province's energy conservation officer, Peter Love. The certificate "recognizes



Inset above, L-R: Home owners Dennis and Melissa Radovic and Victor Fiume, General Manager of Durham Custom Homes.

the leadership role taken by organizations that have made a long-term commitment to conserve electricity in Ontario."

During the launch ceremony, MPP Kim Craiton, parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Community and Social Services, congratulated Durham Custom Homes for its forward thinking. "You've recognized that everyone should have the ability to live without obstacles, or barriers, and that we all truly deserve to have a place to call our home."

Howard Bogach, president and CEO of Tarion Warranty Corporation, reminded attendees that "there is no mandatory 'green' in

homes. What's happening today is that builders are understanding what's required in the marketplace and taking the leading edge."

Jeff Goldman, principal for Durham Custom Homes, expressed his gratitude to everyone who contributed "to making this house a reality. Guys, you have truly built one lean, green, accessible machine."

Other speakers at the launch included Jerry Ouellette, MPP for Oshawa; John Gray, Oshawa's mayor; and Corey McBurney, president of EnerQuality Corporation.

—By Sherry Hinman for Durham Homes