

Featured in Delaware Today

Taking the LEED



Julie and Tony Panaro

You don't need Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification to build green. Anyone can do it. Looking to build a house or remodel your home in a sustainable way? Talk to Tony and Julie Panaro of Panaro Construction. The couple are building what they hope will be the first LEED-certified house in the New Castle County area, in Chesapeake City, Maryland.

Not that one has to pursue Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification to be green. Anyone can build or add in ways that have a low impact on the environment. The benefits include reduction of waste, protection of biodiversity and ecosystems, improved air and water, and conservation of natural resources. A well-built green home means lower energy bills, higher durability, less maintenance and enhanced value.

LEED certification costs \$2,500 to \$3,000. Julie Panaro hopes that the costs will ultimately result in a higher resale value for their home. "Access to resources matters," says Julie. "If the market demands environmentally conscious materials, the industry will respond."

As a sign of progress, she cites recent lending decisions based on anticipated energy savings. "Now some jurisdictions are enacting legislation for green building requirements for commercial or governmental structures, requiring builders to become more environmentally conscious," she adds.



The use of formaldehyde-free foam ensures a drier, better-insulated basement floor.

The Panaros are professionally well situated to build green and seek LEED certification. Tony already does green construction as part of his standard building process because he believes it results in a better, healthier home. He has established relationships with vendors who provide green materials. Julie is a real estate attorney in Wilmington.

The average homeowner might find the price of such green amenities as geothermal heating and cooling systems, about twice that of a conventional system, to be prohibitive. But the Panaros prefer to focus on the payoff. Tony says the costs to build such a system are offset by "major energy savings."

"Any budget has room in it to make environmentally conscious choices," says Julie. "Anything you can do is good," including remodeling your home to be more sustainable. "After all, the pinnacle of sustainability is recycling what you have."



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Tony suggests using Forest Steward Council-certified lumber, formaldehyde-free adhesives, paints that are low in volatile organic chemicals, recycled cellulose insulation, and Energy Star windows and appliances. Because LEED certification and other residential green programs are voluntary, no additional building permits are necessary. "Certification is regulated by the agency issuing it and is not tied to any governmental regulations, zoning, planning or otherwise," says Julie.

That's not to say builders and remodelers won't encounter issues. "These programs are in their infancy and still have a lot of maturing to do before they become streamlined and user friendly," Julie says, "but they have made great progress in the past, and we look forward to continuing with green building in the future."

Visit the Panaros' website, www.panaroconstruction.com, to learn more.

If you prefer new construction, make sure your builder is LEED certified, says Michael Christopher, project manager at Bancroft Homes in Wilmington. Bancroft goes green by using roofing materials made from old tires and spray foam insulation made from soybeans instead of petroleum.

—Katie Ginder-Vogel

