

Arlington Heights house renovation takes the LEED in sustainability



Mike Kollman of Prairie View-based Smart Haus describes plans to renovate the 55-year-old Drury Lane home of Arlington Heights residents Amy Myers and Mike Baker, making it the first LEED Platinum home renovation in the village. (*Steve Zalusky / Staff Photographer*)



Steve Zalusky

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Amy Myers and Mike Baker could have torn down their 1964 split-level home in Arlington Heights and replaced it with a McMansion.

But they wanted to remodel it instead in keeping with the historic charm of the Drury Lane neighborhood where they have lived for 19 years, while remaining true to their ecological principles.

On Sunday, the couple held an open house for what they call the Happy Boolo project -- a reference to their pet names for each other.

A cake decorated with the words "community, functionality & sustainability" testified to the core principles of the renovation, which is set to begin in January. The couple will move into a home they are renting down the street until the project is finished, hopefully in time for Thanksgiving.

The home will be compatible with the historic feel of the close-knit neighborhood, where neighbors gather for Friday happy hours during the summer, attend monthly book clubs and organize block parties.

But it also promises to be very forward-looking.

It will be the first LEED Platinum home renovation in Arlington Heights. LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is governed by the U.S. Green Building Council and serves as the most widely used green building rating system in the world.

The house has been designed with such features as net zero energy consumption, smart stormwater management and integrated rainwater storage. Plans include wrapping it in a tight thermal envelope and utilizing materials like airtight drywall to maximize the home's energy efficiency.

A planned forest garden will feature layers of trees and shrubs that will yield fruits, berries, nuts, herbs and root vegetables. Baker said he will even be able to grow watermelons on the roof.

A honey locust tree in front of the home will be removed, but repurposed in the garden as well as for shelving in the house.

The couple emphasized the importance of leaving a legacy.

"If we want to continue to live healthy prosperous lives as human beings on the planet, we have got to care," Myers said.

"We don't have children, so this is our child," Baker added

The couple plans to stay in the house as long as they can.

"We're not building the house to flip it and make a profit," Baker said.

Guests included Myers' friend Valerie McEnroe, who traveled from Ohio for the open house.

"I just think that we should all try to do everything we can to be good stewards of the earth," she said.

Also on hand was Mike Kollman, a member of the design team and owner of Smart Haus in Prairie View. He said the house will use about 70% less energy than a new home built today,

"We're really trying to do everything we can to make his a model of how you can recycle a 1960s home into something for the future," Kollman said.