‘Eco-houses’ won’t cost you as much green

By Amy Howell
Enquirer staff writer

It’s now a little easier to be a “green” home buyer in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky. A modestly sized and priced “eco-house” on Schirmer Avenue in Anderson Township could plant the seeds for an affordable breed of environmentally friendly and energy-efficient home that had been available only in the high-end housing market.

“The goal of the eco-house series is not to create demonstration houses that people immediately reject because they are over-the-top or require additional work from the homeowner,” says builder/developer Steve Evans, with Green City Builders in Anderson Township.

Through building “green” from the grass up, Evans allocated savings from pre-fabricated materials, a simple design and moderate square footage into energy-saving amenities that are expected to quickly grow into a profitable investment for the homeowner.

“These simple and unobtrusive design concepts, when applied correctly, go unnoticed yet save homeowners money every month,” Evans says.

E-mail ahowell@enquirer.com

Inside
Eco-friendly houses can reduce utility costs; where to get more information.

Steve Evans of Green City Builders looks out the back of his company’s “eco-house” on Schirmer Avenue, Anderson Township.
A two-bedroom house at 1228 Schirmer Ave. has the same buttercream-colored siding as the home next door, with a deep backyard and simple two-story design common in this Anderson Township neighborhood.

Even the home’s pre-fabricated construction, tree-filled lot and windows oriented to the north and south do little to draw attention to the environmentally friendly and energy-efficient construction of this “eco-house,” which will be featured in the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) Cincinnati regional chapter’s “Greening Your Home” tour next Sunday.

Eco-friendly home construction, like hybrid cars, is finding its way into mainstream neighborhoods and influencing practical home upgrades.

“We wanted to do an entry-level home to show that the concepts are applicable to the entire market, not just high-end homes,” says Steve Evans, builder and developer with Green City Builders in Anderson Township.

“Building green takes more planning, but not necessarily more money,” says John Telintelo, architect and member of the USGBC Cincinnati chapter.

Guided by the U.S. Department of Energy’s Energy Star guidelines, Evans invested savings from the home’s factory-built foundation, pre-fabricated construction and 1,100-square-foot floor plan into high-quality, energy-efficient amenities and materials. The buyer will absorb about $2,000 of the upgrades but should save about $20-$30 per month in utilities, Evans estimates.

“The (added cost) is not significant from a home buyer’s perspective because of how much they save monthly,” he says.

A pre-cast concrete foundation uses 30 percent less concrete than a traditional poured-in-place foundation, and the home’s pre-fabricated construction generated two-thirds of the waste produced by on-site “stick” construction, compared with averages from the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB).

The high-efficiency windows, furnace, water heater, air conditioning system and additional insulation will save an eco-house owner about 20 percent on utility bills, says Evans, who designed the ductwork and sized the furnace according to calculations on the heat gain and loss in each room.

To form a sealed system in the home, all electric outlets, HVAC joints and other openings are caulked or glued.

Evans expects the low-flow plumbing fixtures, Energy Star dishwasher and optional Energy Star appliance package to use about 30 percent less water than NAHB’s averages.

The reduced construction costs allowed Evans to install high-end, eco-friendly finishes — formaldehyde-free wood products, bamboo floors harvested from renewable forests and Green-Labeled carpet that utilizes recycled material — without increasing the home’s $153,000 asking price.

For buyers looking to go greener, stormwater is directed into one pipe, which can be connected to a rainwater collection system, and the house is equipped to accommodate solar power.

E-mail ahowell@enquirer.com