



Rhonda and Nigel Farrar stand on the lot in Escondido where their energy-efficient dream home will be built.

JOHN KOSTER | For the North County Times

GREEN DREAMS

Couple's custom-built home to meld environmentalism, comfort

By **BRADLEY J. FIKES**

bfikes@nctimes.com

ESCONDIDO — On a two-acre parcel overlooking Lake Hodges, Rhonda and Nigel Farrar are building their dream home.

To be constructed over the next year, the 3,000-square-foot, 4-bedroom home is being designed to be open, airy and comfortable.

It's also intended to be a model of environmental efficiency.

Environmental responsibility doesn't have to mean a lower standard of living, say the Farrars, who want their home in unincorporated Escondido to be an example for others.

San Diego Gas & Electric Co. is

assisting as one of its case studies in energy-efficient homes.

The home will be more expensive than a traditionally constructed one, Farrar said, but in the long run it will save money.

Physically, the home is now just markings on the ground for the construction crew.

Nearly all the work lies ahead.

As the home is built, the North County Times will be following the Farrars through the project.

The opportunity

The Farrars, who live in Poway, recently purchased the empty 2-acre parcel in Escondido.

The decision took some thought, Farrar said, because it was a major commitment.

"Building houses is a lot of effort, but we really wanted a small house on a big lot, and in this day and age that's very rare to find," she said.

"Most developers build these McMansions. We're building a much more modest home by San Diego standards, although still a large home. I live in a neighborhood of 2-acre parcels, and some of these homes are 12,000 square feet," she said.

While relatively small, the home won't be Spartan.

It will have a room for guests, exercise, laundry, dining, family time and it will also have a breakfast nook.

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A courtyard will take the place of a living room.

Other amenities include a pool and spa, outdoor barbecue and fireplace, fountains and wells.

Planning it out

As an SDG&E case study under its Advanced Home Program, the Farrar home qualifies for \$10,000 in assistance, as well as advice in making the best choices in construction techniques, said April Bolduc, a spokeswoman for the utility.

"They are only the third case study that we've done this year," Bolduc said.

One of the others is the home of actor Richard Dreyfuss in Encinitas. To qualify for the program, homes must be 40 percent more energy-efficient than required under Title 24 of the California building code.

"Some of the things they would want to do is use high-efficiency equipment, put in better windows, have a more energy-efficient air conditioning, and make sure the sun doesn't hit the windows directly," Bolduc said.

SDG&E suggests those building homes call the utility before construction begins, whether or not they are applying for the program. The utility can be reached at 866-631-1744.

"We can give you recommendations on how you should orient your house, because that has a lot to do with how energy-efficient the home is," Bolduc said.

From materials to generation

To design the home, the Farrars tapped Hubbell and Hubbell, a family-owned firm in San Diego that specializes in environmentally friendly design. James Hubbell is an artist; his son Drew is an architect.

Renewable and recycled materials such as bamboo and cork will be used whenever possible. A geothermal system will provide temperature control. Electricity



The Farrars stand on the lot in Escondido — overlooking Lake Hodges — where they're going to build their dream home. JOHN KOSTER | For the North County Times

will be supplied through solar panels and perhaps through wind turbines, if feasible.

Some of these features, such as using bamboo and properly orienting the home won't cost any more than traditional building techniques, Drew Hubbell said.

But the solar panels and geothermal system will add to the cost.

The solar panels, which convert sunlight into electricity, typically cost from about \$20,000 to \$40,000, but the investment is recouped over about eight years from lower electricity bills, Hubbell said.

The geothermal system is more ambitious. It will send loops of liquid-filled pipes

about 200 to 250 feet below ground, cooling the house in the summer and in the winter, warming it from the ambient air temperature.

Overall, the green construction techniques are expected to add from 10 to 20 percent to the cost of the house, Hubbell said.

Farrar said the extra expense is an investment that will pay for itself down the road.

"We are basically pre-paying for all of the heating, cooling and electricity that our home, and, hopefully, our cars will require for our lifetime," Farrar said.

Home grown

And materials produced locally or nearby can be

just as good as more famous products from far away, she said.

"The La Cantina folding doors for our home will be made here in Oceanside," Farrar said.

"They are not only beautiful, but gentle on the environment and our pocketbook because they are shipped locally. Instead of shipping Travertine tiles from Italy, we are considering tiles made in nearby Mexico that are less expensive and stunningly beautiful," she said.

The surroundings will provide their own environmental contributions. A small farm supplied with well water will provide fresh food for the Farrars

and for neighbors.

Instead of driving to the grocery for produce, they'll just walk outside, Farrar said.

"I'd like to be her neighbor to take advantage of that," said Drew Hubbell, the architect.

Another planned benefit is that the vegetation will absorb carbon dioxide, which many climate scientists believe is causing global warming.

"The biggest draw is the possibility of it being carbon-neutral," Farrar said.

In environmental jargon, that means the home and its surroundings will sequester, or take in, as much carbon as released into the air.

"It's a new concept by today's standards, but several generations ago that's how everything was, it was all sustainable, and pretty much carbon-neutral," Farrar said.

Of course, Farrar doesn't intend to hand-wash her clothes by a river or churn her own butter.

The home will have modern appliances, certified as energy-efficient by the federal government's Energy Star program.

"We're going back in history, but in a very comfortable and modern way," Farrar said.

Call staff writer Bradley J. Fikes at 760-739-6641. Read his blogs at bizblogs.nctimes.com.