

# A Bolder Shade Of Green 'Builder Year'

*Local Team Earns State Accolades For Sustainable Constructions*

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**HARRISONBURG** — Walking into Carroll and Nancy Yoders' Greystone Street home is almost like continuing your walk outside, if "outside" was about 25 degrees cooler and much more comfortable.

Sunlight shines down on three solar panels, which heat much of the water the Yoders use for showers, laundry and dishwashing. A tank- less propane water heater sits in the basement for backup.

The couple rarely turns on an electric light during the day.

A large overhang connected to a light- colored metal roof drapes several feet over the massive living room windows, keeping away unwanted heat.

The two-level, 2,300square-foot house features almost every locally harvested tree available: oak floors and hickory kitchen cabinets, with splashes of pine and walnut throughout the building.

A deep planter, which also serves to keep the Yoders' small grandchildren from harm, sits on top of the banister of the stairs leading to the basement.

While the Yoders have always known their Harrisonburg home is something special, the house is starting to get noticed well beyond the central Valley.

AM Yoder & Co. Inc., a Harrisonburg- based company owned by Aaron Yoder and his wife, Melinda, won two awards in March during the third annual Sustainable Leadership competition sponsored by Richmondbased EarthCraft Virginia, including one for the Yoders' home they built.

The company took home the Builder of the Year award and the third most-sustainable home built in 2011 for the Harrisonburg house.

Despite the shared last name, Aaron and Melinda Yoder, both Eastern Mennonite University alumni, are not related to the homeowners.

Next week, Carroll and Nancy Yoders' son, Joel, is moving into another AM Yoder & Co. house next door.

"We felt [Aaron] was well-educated on the whole energy efficient- style house," Joel Yoder said.

The Yoders' home, which they moved into in June 2011, is the most sustainable Aaron Yoder has worked on so far, he said. The Home Energy Rating System, or HERS rating, reported that it's about 53 percent more efficient than a traditionally built home.

He's constructed 10 homes since the company began in 2007, and he's working on the first EarthCraft-certified home in Augusta County.

"Everything we do kind of has shades of green ... but not everyone wants to go this far," said Aaron Yoder.

The house features Yoder's signature structural style: concrete blocks covered in Styrofoam that are more energy-efficient than typical framework.

During its most recent assessment, performed last August, the home was valued at almost \$204,000. In general, EarthCraft-certified homes cost 3 to 5 percent more than a traditional structure but deliver savings of up to 40 percent on utilities for the owners, Aaron Yoder said.

So far, the Yoders have been paying no more than \$70 each month for electricity with the airconditioning running. The electricity bill at their former home, which was smaller, was about the same without the air-conditioning on, according to Carroll Yoder.

Some of his favorite aspects of the home are the natural light and thick, well-insulated walls.

"It's a very pleasant feeling to have all the light," he said. "[And] in the winter, you don't hear anything."

Aaron Yoder said the home came together with the perfect combination of the right budget and the right client who was interested in conserving energy.

An exercise bike sits under Carroll Yoder's computer in his basement, one of the many points of pride for him throughout his home.

"This is the way you keep up your exercise," he said, laughing.

"Our clients were sustainable before they hired us," Aaron Yoder added.

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