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Affordable living through energy efficiency

By Mike Arblaster and Jerry Leach

The housing market is gaining momentum. Mifflin County last year issued its most building permits since 2010.

An increase in construction is not only good news for the economy. It also creates an opportunity to build homes that put more money back into the pocket of homeowners.

Newly built homes often save their buyers energy — and money — over time. The U.S. Department of Energy reports that a standard, code-compliant home is, on average, 30 percent more efficient than those resold on the market.

But as buyers demand larger homes, the cost for homeowners to heat and cool their properties are likely to increase. Today's homes are, according to the U.S. Energy Information Agency, 20 percent larger than those built 35 years ago.

Fortunately, larger homes need not come with larger energy bills. Tightly sealed construction can reduce drafts, improving comfort and air quality, while more robust insulation systems maintain even temperatures throughout the house.

Further energy savings are achieved by builders who pursue ENERGY STAR® certification. The same label that identifies more energy-efficient appliances also demonstrates homes that have undergone a process of inspections, testing and verification to guarantee energy savings. ENERGY STAR-certified new homes typically use 20 to 30 percent less energy when compared to a new home built to code.

To keep homeowner expenses low, members of the Mifflin Juniata Builders Association are partnering with Penelec in a program that offers financial incentives for building homes that save energy.

The Pennsylvania Energy Efficient New Homes Program, offered by FirstEnergy's Pennsylvania utilities, provides eligible builders with financial incentives if their homes are built to use 30 percent less energy than required by the 2009 International Energy Conservation Code®. Additional incentives are available for homes that are ENERGY STAR certified.

By using 30 percent less energy, homeowners can expect to save hundreds of dollars each year that would otherwise be spent on electricity, according to a regional analysis of energy costs.

The 2015 Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission Rate Comparison Report, published in April, states that an average household within the Penelec service territory that uses electricity for both lighting and heating could save more than \$700 each year if their home used 30 percent less energy.

Besides saving on utility bills, energy-efficient homes provide several added benefits. Properly-sized equipment, adequate insulation and demonstrated construction practices ensure even temperatures throughout the house and improved comfort, reducing drafts, moisture, dust, pollen, pests and noise.

To find members of the Mifflin Juniata Builders Association who participate in the Pennsylvania Energy Efficient New Homes Program, visit www.energysavepa-newhomes.com.

In addition to ensuring homes are affordable, members of the Mifflin Juniata Builders Association uphold high standards of quality and integrity. All members voluntarily adopt performance standards, a Code of Ethics, and proof of liability and workers compensation insurance.

Learn more by visiting www.mifflinjuniatabuilders.org.

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