

# In greater Berks, construction benefits on the rise

Homeowners who purchase from builders that participate in a green program regularly save 30 percent in energy costs.

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When you think of a “green home,” what comes to mind? Is it a house that is made to be sustainable, as well as environmentally friendly?

Green homes are that and more, often focusing on the best way to use energy, water and building materials. They’ve become more popular as they’ve become more affordable.

Kevin Kozo, owner of Turnberry Construction Group, Cumru Township, said a green home is truly a culmination of many items.

“First and foremost is an energy-efficient design to capture the power of the sun, as well as mechanical components that will use less energy than the current codes require,” he said.

Today’s homebuilders can incorporate many features that lower their energy use, avoid wasting water or allow them to generate electricity, said Mike Arblaster, program manager for the Pennsylvania Energy Efficient New Homes Program.

This program is offered by FirstEnergy’s Pennsylvania utilities — Met-Ed, Penelec, Penn Power and West Penn Power — and is designed to

help customers identify which homes on the market will save the most energy and money, Arblaster said.

“To qualify, builders must exceed the state’s minimum building codes by at least 15 percent,” he said. “Homes that undergo more thorough energy-efficiency and water-conservation testing are designated with certification from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Energy Star program.”

## Energy Star ratings

According to the energystar.gov website, to earn the Energy Star rating, items or products must “meet strict energy-efficiency criteria set by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency or the U.S. Department of Energy.” Since they use less energy, these products, especially when used in a house, save a person money on his electric bill, in turn lowering emissions from power plants and helping the environment.

Kozo said the movement toward solar and energy-efficient design has been around for decades.

“Many builders (in Berks County) offer different items that can be considered green, but in the end if it costs more, there needs to be a value to the consumer,” he said.

There are three builders active in Berks County who participate in the Pennsylvania Energy Efficient New Homes Program, Arblaster said.

“The builders are Keystone Custom Homes, Hearthstone Homes and Bortz Construction,” he said.

Keystone Custom Homes is in Manheim Township, Lancaster County; Hearthstone Homes is in Wyomissing; and Bortz is in Oley.

Keystone was this year’s winner of the Remodelers/Builder Award for Energy Efficiency and Sustainability from the Home Builders Association of Berks County.

The award, sponsored by the Pennsylvania Energy Efficient New Homes Program, was presented to Keystone for a home it built in Union Township, said Ben Rutt, director of marketing.

“This home uses 35 percent less energy than a standard new home, saving an expected 3,500 kilowatts per hour per year, due to Keystone Custom Homes’ use of LEDs throughout the home and a very tightly constructed frame that limits air from escaping to the outdoors,” said Ben Block, marketing and communications manager at Clean Markets, a company that works with FirstEnergy’s Pennsylvania utilities to promote the Pennsylvania Energy Efficient New Homes Program.



COURTESY OF KEYSTONE CUSTOM HOMES

Keystone Custom Homes, Manheim Township, Lancaster County, qualified for participation in the Pennsylvania Energy Efficient New Homes Program because its home at 308 Applewood Road, Amity Township, uses advanced framing and other energy-efficiency techniques.

## Efficient design

Rutt said that Keystone has always believed that every customer should have a solidly built, energy-efficient home.

“We don’t build so that only some homes are energy-efficient, and some are not,” he said. “Our goal is to bring energy-efficient plans to the market and make them available for all of our customers.”

Rutt said Keystone has had this commitment toward solidly built, energy-efficient design since building its first home in 1992.

“All of our green energy features are included standard on every Keystone Custom Home,” he said. “Our customers love that they can get green features included

in their home without having to pay more for their new home.”

Recent surveys indicate that energy efficiency is an increasingly popular feature among homebuyers, Arblaster said.

“A 2017 National Association of Realtors report found that about three out of every four Realtors promote energy efficiency when selling a home,” he said.

Even if buyers aren’t thinking about energy, Arblaster said that they are thinking about the benefits of energy efficiency.

“The same study found that 95 percent of surveyed homebuyers want a comfortable living space when choosing a home,” he said.

## Keystone Custom Homes

**Location:** 227 Granite Run Drive, Suite 100, Manheim Township, Lancaster County  
**Phone:** 877-513-0385  
**Website:** www.keystonecustomhome.com  
**Hours:** Sundays to Saturdays, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

## Turnberry Construction Group

**Location:** 1346 Welsh Road, Cumru Township  
**Phone:** 610-775-7575  
**Website:** www.turnberryconstructiongroup.com  
**Hours:** Mondays to Fridays, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; closed on Saturdays and Sundays

But, in the end, does it substantially raise the building cost of the home?

Arblaster said that some energy-efficiency practices cost more.

“Still, homeowners benefit from energy-efficient insulation, appliances and lighting equipment over time through lower utility expenses,” he said. “Homeowners who purchase from builders who participate in the Pennsylvania Energy Efficient New Homes Program regularly save 30 percent in energy costs.”

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