



# Energy Star House

## *Linda Salisbury*

Roofers are pounding nails into decking on a sunny August day at Lake Anna. The owners of the house under construction are reviewing plans and progress with their builder. On the surface it would seem to be yet another beautiful house going up, but there's much more going on. The 4,500-square-foot home is the first that Battlefield Homes is building at the lake that will be certified under the government's Energy Star program.

Owners Stephanie and Tim Fitzgerald expect to see significant savings in energy costs, and the "icing on the cake" is a five-year-exemption from Spotsylvania County property taxes on the house.

Energy Star is a joint program of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

and the U.S. Department of Energy. According to the program's Web site, "Americans, with the help of Energy Star, saved enough energy in 2008 alone to avoid greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to those from 29 million cars—all while saving \$19 billion on their utility bills." In addition to the generous county property tax break, federal credits are also available. Spotsylvania County adopted the program in 2007, but despite a number of inquiries from builders, the Fitzgeralds' house is the first to go through it, according to Debbie Williams, commissioner of revenue for Spotsylvania County.

The local story begins with the couple's search for waterfront property. Stephanie grew up on the water in New England. "I have a love of water," she says. Tim had gone to college in





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Charlottesville, and had worked in Central Virginia so he was familiar with the general area. They checked out a number of Virginia lakes before settling on an acre-lot overlooking an unnamed cove they've dubbed "Fitzgerald." A large deck provides a view of the water, where they will eventually have their boathouse. Tim, who enjoys fishing, happily notes that the cove is full of large fish.



Stephanie says, "We wanted privacy and tranquility." It's important to be able to get to restaurants and stores, but they wanted their new home location to be quiet and serene. No wonder. Both work

in sales for Cisco Systems, and are familiar with the rat race of Northern Virginia.

The couple has looked for ways to make their lifestyle more energy-efficient,

even before deciding to build their Energy Star house. Stephanie drives a fuel-efficient hybrid and planned on purchasing appliances certified as Energy Star.

Under the Energy Star government program, builders must be certified to partici-

pate, and certain standards are set for various stages of construction, such as insulation. An independent inspector, not part of the county's building department inspections, must run tests to make



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sure that the Energy Star standards are upheld. Todd Holmes, of East Coast Insulators, is the certified rater for the Fitzgerald’s project. The inspection process includes: a duct blast, blower door, thermal bypass checklist and visual site inspections.

Besides insulation, the program deals with efficient equipment for heating, cooling, and water heating; lighting, includes those that earn the energy star

and appliances.

Allen Harrison, operations manager for Battlefield Homes, says that to be an Energy Star builder, you must apply to Energy Star, the federal office, as well as selecting your builder rater. You must then work closely with the raters to design and build the home that is inspected at several stages and again upon completion. The federal office must sign off on the Energy Star completion that is submitted to the county for the tax waiver program.

He says that, for example, the insulation used is not the typical fiberglass batts that are found in most homes. Under Energy Star, they use a liquid that is blown in and expands to make foam that fills in all little cracks. The ductwork is tested with a fogger, so if there are any leaks, they are quickly detected.

Allen says that the Energy Star certification doesn’t add to the time it takes to build the house. It’s a matter of carefully plan-

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Stephanie and Tim Fitzgerald look over plans with Allen Harrison, operations manager.

ning the various stages of construction.

Stephanie adds that because the house will be so tightly sealed, there will be a mechanical ventilation system to bring fresh air inside. She's looking forward to the comfort of constant temperature inside once they move in during the late fall.

Participation in the program adds to the cost of the construction, depending on options selected, but Stephanie and Tim expect to recoup that cost and more through the tax credits and energy savings.

Meanwhile, there's that serene location for a busy family, an energy-efficient dream home, and the fish are jumping in "Fitzgerald Cove." Pictures of the completed house may be available for the spring edition of Lake Anna Connections. Many of the other builders at Lake Anna are also Energy Star builders, so if you are interested, please check with them for their certification.

Additional information is available on the Spotsylvania County Web site: [www.spotsylvania.va.us/departments/cor/](http://www.spotsylvania.va.us/departments/cor/) and through [www.energystar.gov/](http://www.energystar.gov/)

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