

Columbia River Gorge Business Review



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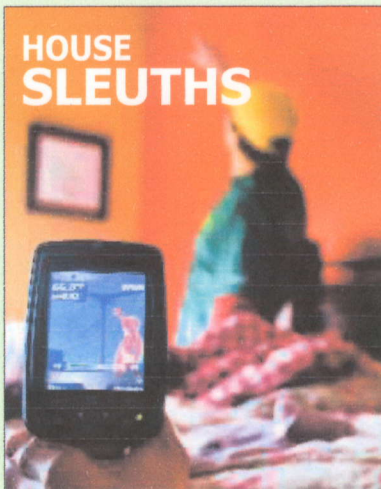
A number of projects spring up in the Gorge

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Covering Gorge Business

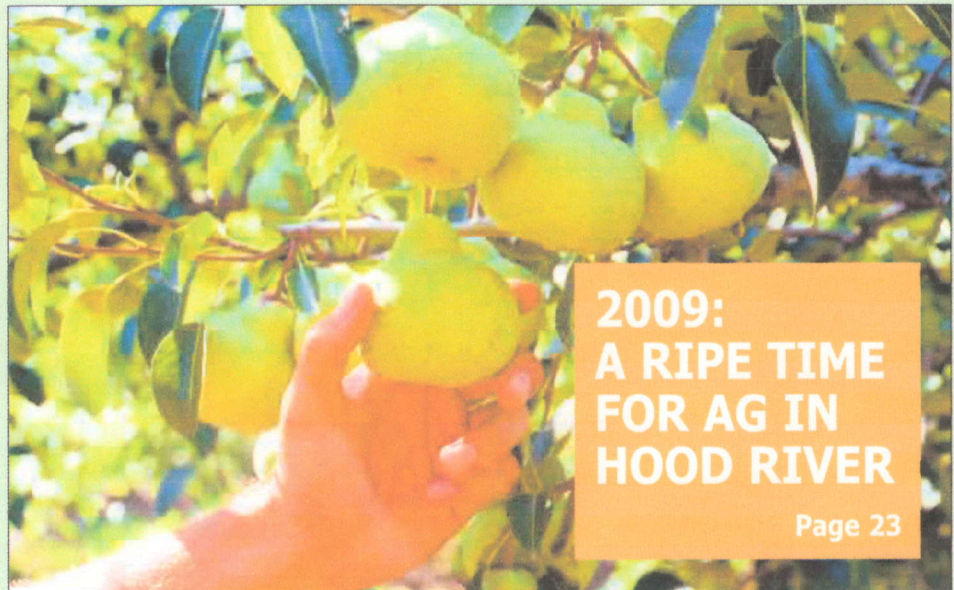
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HOUSE SLEUTHS

Green expansion leads to new opportunities

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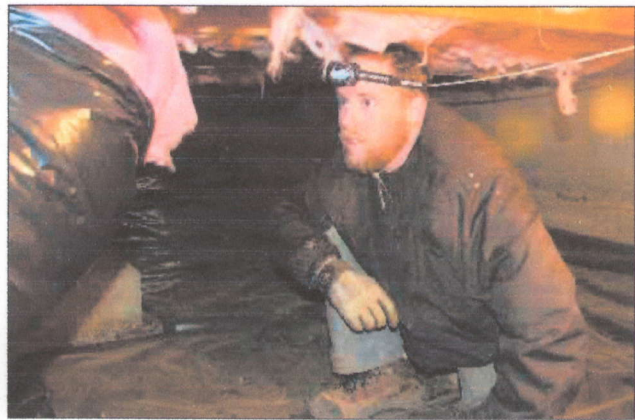
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FOCUS ON GREEN BUSINESS



Weatherization sleuths are homeowners' boon

Energy audits are one way Green Home Construction is expanding its business

By **JANET COOK**
CRG Business Review

HOOD RIVER – Tom Reid can make potentially dry subjects like home weatherization and energy audits interesting by his sheer enthusiasm for them. That, and the analogies he uses, make you want him to come to your house ASAP and weatherize it.

“Take air sealing, for example,” he says. “It’s like wearing a 200-weight polar fleece jacket and hopping on your bike and riding downtown. Your house is the same way. You might have a good insulator, but it’s not going to stop the wind from blowing through.”

Reid and his Hood River-based company, Green Home Construction, have expanded their environmentally-friendly philosophical reach beyond green construction and remodeling to address a widespread problem: energy wasted

due to poor home weatherization.

Typically, the biggest culprits are air leakage in a home’s “shell” – including around doors and window frames, plumbing and electrical fixtures, fireplaces and access doors to attic spaces – and through its duct system.

Small leaks in any of these places – which let warm air out and cold air in, or cause the heating system to operate inefficiently – can translate to higher-than-necessary energy bills.

In fact, Reid says that air sealing and duct sealing, which are the simplest and most cost-effective steps to weatherizing a home, can save homeowners hundreds of dollars off a yearly energy bill.

“The reality is, most people’s energy bills are pretty high,” Reid says, but they don’t like to talk about it. “People don’t know where to go or how to get it fixed.”

Reid has invested in some high-tech equipment for diagnostic testing of these two problem areas. A blower

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Adam Lapierre photos
(Above photo) Steven Todorov and Dana Sheffler conduct an energy audit on a home. (Above right) Bob Reid checks insulation under the house.

FOCUS ON GREEN BUSINESS

Green

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door testing unit, consisting of a panel with a built-in fan that fits in an open doorway, first pressurizes or depressurizes a home to a standard level, then its gauges measure air leakage.

A duct blaster functions in a similar way, but is connected to the home's duct system to measure leaks there.

Along with investing in the equipment, Reid has become certified to perform audits under both the nationally-accredited Home Energy Rating System (HERS) guidelines, as well as the Home Performance with Energy Star program.

An energy audit performed by Reid and Green Home Construction costs nothing thanks to a cash incentive from the Oregon Department of Energy and the Energy Trust of Oregon. After Reid performs an audit, consisting of the blower door and duct blaster tests – which take about two hours – Reid will even fill out the paperwork for the cash rebate.

With the results of the diagnostic tests, Reid can make recommendations as to specific weatherization measures that would help make a home more energy efficient – and therefore cheaper to maintain.

Currently, homeowners using Pacific Power, Northwest Natural Gas, propane, oil or wood/pellets for heat can take advantage of further cash-back incentives and tax credits for various weatherization measures.

According to Reid, a typical home



Adam Lapierre photo
Tom Reid, owner of Green Home Construction, has expanded the business to include energy audits.

can benefit from about \$300-500 in weatherization measures. With the incentives available, homeowners can get about half of that back.

"A lot of what we do is educating," Reid says. "A lot of people think of weatherization as insulation and windows. But it's a lot more than that."

Along with the instant benefits of weatherization (lower heating bills), there are less obvious ones like extending the life of a home's heat system.

"If you've got

a house where the heat system turns on and off frequently, there's probably an air sealing problem," Reid says. A properly sealed and weatherized home should require the heat system to turn on only every 4-5 hours to maintain a constant temperature level, according to Reid.

"If it's coming on less frequently, you're going to lengthen the life of the system," he says.

In addition, an energy audit can lead to sealing leaks in places like attics and

crawl spaces, which allow poor quality air into a home's living spaces. Reid also can test for gas leaks from appliances and fireplaces.

"I haven't tested a house yet that didn't have a gas leak," he says.

Older homes have obvious weatherization issues, according to Reid, but he's been amazed at how poorly even some newer homes fare during his audits.

"When we do an audit, we add up all the small leaks and say, What would it look like as one leak?" Reid says.

"Sometimes it's the equivalent of a 3-foot-by-3-foot window being open. That's actually typical of new construction.

"Some other homes, it's more like a pair of French doors being open," he adds.

Reid and his Green Home Construction might be one of the few construction companies around that hasn't laid off a single employee during the economic downturn. In fact, with the energy audits and weatherization work, as well as a full docket of remodeling jobs, Reid has actually done some hiring – bringing his company to eight full-time employees and three part-timers.

And, he's busy enough with energy audits that he's getting ready to purchase a third set of diagnostic equipment.

Reid recognizes the dryness of the topic, but that's where his skill at explaining things in simple terms comes in.

"I can talk on and on to people about this," he says. "But it's not usually until I can walk around in their house and show them the leaks and how this all works – it becomes really clear to people then."

For more information about weatherization and Green Home Construction, go to www.greenhome-construction.com

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