Stumbling into Excellence

Since 1990, Ideal Homes has worked hard to position itself as the premier green builder in Oklahoma. “I wish I could tell you it was a conscious choice we made,” chuckles Vernon McKown, the co-owner and vice president of Ideal Homes, “But we got into energy-efficient homebuilding purely by accident.”

Ideal Homes found a deal on efficient air conditioners and used the efficiency savings as a selling point. It worked so well that they decided to look into other ways to save energy. By adopting ENERGY STAR and Building America standards, Ideal Homes quickly became Oklahoma’s largest homebuilder. Their dedication to healthy, energy-efficient building practices has won several accolades and awards, most recently the 2007 “America’s Best Builder” award from Builder Magazine and the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) and the 2006 Energy Star for Homes Outstanding Achievement Award.

Standard Features and Beyond

Ideal Homes builds a variety of homes, though about half of their buyers are first-time home owners. No matter what price or style is offered, energy saving technologies are included in all. Standard homes have insulating sheathing, air sealing at connection points, low-e windows, 14 SEER cooling systems, 90+% AFUE furnaces and more. The techniques used have helped Ideal Homes achieve energy savings 50% higher than other houses built in similar markets.

The Whole Building Approach

By working with Building Science Consortium (BSC), a Building America team lead, Ideal Homes has developed building practices that include mastic sealed ducts, R-30 blown cellulose in the ceiling, and careful attention to areas where air leakage can occur. Recently they have started using R8 duct insulation instead of R6. With a tightly sealed house, Ideal Homes can offer buyers lower heating and cooling bills, as well as a healthier environment.

McKown notes that Ideal Homes takes a whole building approach to constructing solid, affordable, energy-efficient homes.

Training, Teaching & Outreach

Ideal Homes constantly tries to learn new techniques and methods they may apply to their homebuilding repertoire. When a new technology
Ideal Homes

Sometimes these new techniques become standard, but without the expert guidance of BSC, Ideal Homes might have missed a great opportunity to enhance their expertise.

“The access to a Building America Team helps us make logical, thoughtful decisions about our purchases and building plans,” says Vernon McKown. “Where do you go when you don’t have a building scientist on your staff to answer your technical questions? We go to BSC; they are always willing to give us solid guidance.”

The Building America Program

Building America is a private/public partnership sponsored by DOE that conducts systems research to improve overall housing performance, increase housing durability and comfort, reduce energy use, and increase energy security for America’s homeowners. Building America teams construct test houses and community-scale projects that incorporate systems innovations. The teams design houses from the ground up, considering the interaction between the site, building envelope, mechanical systems, and other factors, and recognizing that features of one component in the house can greatly affect others.

More than 40,000 energy-efficient houses have been built by the seven teams to date.