



Jacek Helenowski, with his wife, Marta, and 17-month-old daughter, Luxa, expects to have the top-rated LEED-certified home. DAVE SHIELDS/PHOTOS FOR THE TRIBUNE

Elements of a green LEEDer

A small but growing number of homebuyers and builders are driven by eco-friendly aspirations

By Pamela Dittmer McKuen
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Jacek Helenowski is a lighting guy. He makes large-scale lighting displays like those on building facades or the underside of canopies. When the time came to build a new family home, he wanted it as energy efficient as possible. He heard about a rating program for eco-friendly construction called LEED, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, and decided to apply.

"Everything you can think of that is green is in this house," he said. "A lot of them cost almost nothing to do."

The Northwest Side home is built with mostly recycled or reclaimed materials. The insulation came from soybeans and old blue jeans. Fire-scorched timbers were shaved and reused. A rooftop windmill generates electricity, silently and without harming birds. On one side, the roof curves downward, forming an awning that allows maximum sunlight to penetrate the windows in the winter when solar warmth is wanted and minimum sunlight in the summer when it isn't.

Helenowski started the house in 2004, doing much of the work himself. When he finishes next year, he expects to earn the highest rating of any LEED-certified house in the country.

Helenowski isn't the only consumer who wants a home that consumes less energy, is healthier to live in and doesn't abuse the Earth's resources to build. Buyers and builders, driven by growing environmental consciousness and, sometimes, tax savings, increasingly are seeking the stamp of approval from LEED, an initiative of the nonprofit U.S. Green Building Council in Washington, D.C.

"LEED certification is something that consumers can look for to identify homes that have been third-party inspected, performance-tested and certified as green homes that will perform better than conventional homes," said Jason La Fleur, a LEED consultant and project director for the Alliance of Environmental Sustainability in Chicago.

"LEED quantifies how green a home is, and makes it verifiable compared to others," said Helenowski. "You don't have someone saying it's green 'just because I say it is.'"

LEED was launched in 1998 with an emphasis on commercial buildings. Additional cate-

gories have been added for other building types, such as schools and health care facilities. LEED for Homes, which applies to single-family and multifamily homes up to six stories, piloted in 2005 and rolled out nationally in 2008. Buildings taller than six stories fall into the LEED for New Construction category.

LEED isn't the only rating system. The National Association of Home Builders has developed a program called National Green Building Standard, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency sponsors one called Energy Star. LEED is more widely recognized, at least in Illinois, which ranks sixth in commercial green construction, said La Fleur.

About 3,000 homes across the country have been LEED-certified. In Illinois, 14 projects are certified, and about 40 are undergoing the process, which begins during the design stage and ends after occupancy, said La Fleur.

"It's one of the bright areas in the (slow) homebuilding market," he said.

But not all LEED-certified homes are the same. There are four levels of certification—certified, silver, gold and platinum. Builders



The green roof is made of several inches of topsoil, grass and a variety of flowering plants for water retention.



Insulation is made from soy oil-based plastic. Helenowski said he doesn't expect to recoup the extra expenses to get LEED certification.



Each room in the house has an individual pump and thermostat for the radiant heating.

Planning helps take big bite out of grocery expenses



Gregory Karp
Spending Smart

Stephanie Nelson once took a friend grocery shopping. The friend put little or no effort into the trip and stocked her basket with her usual items. With identical shopping lists, the

friend spent \$250. Nelson? \$75.

Though Nelson, author of "The Coupon Mom's Guide to Cutting Your Grocery Bills in Half," is an expert, that's not even an extraordinary example. Super shoppers such as Nelson demonstrate similar savings almost anywhere, week after week.

"People think, 'Grocery spending, who cares? That's the minor spending,'" said Nelson, who operates CouponMom.com.

But groceries are huge. The American family of four spends \$9,200 a year on food. Add paper goods, personal-care products and other items, and you're spending \$10,000 annually.

"Your mortgage is set, your car payment is set and you have to pay your taxes. The biggest spending category where you have some wiggle room is groceries," Nelson said. "People don't realize that by learning a few tricks, they could be saving a lot of money."

The key is planning your supermarket trip. But not everybody is willing or able to invest the time. Here are tips based on the amount of time you can plan:

Minimal effort for great savings: For what Nelson calls "busy" shoppers, doing no planning but spending five minutes on strategy after you arrive at the store reaps 20 percent to 25 percent off regular supermarket prices.

Concept: When you get to the store, pick up a sales flier, paying particular attention to front-page offers and in-store cou-

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