

And the winner is ... all of us, and our planet

By Tom Watson
Special to The Seattle Times

When I was asked to be the judge for "Green Me Up," my first question was whether this was one of those mean and nasty reality TV shows.

But producer Liza Keckler, of Seattle's Screaming Flea Productions, assured me the focus was on two local families tackling a **green** transformation of their homes and their lives. So I jumped at the chance to be part of it.

The Petersons and the Willisess were competing to see who could make their Queen Anne home the most eco-friendly. Because the show airs today — at 6 p.m. and again at 10 p.m. on the DIY Network (digital cable or via satellite) — I can't say who I picked as the winner.

But as it turned out, the two families accomplished more in their quest to "go **green**" than I ever would have dreamed. The Petersons and Willisess seem like pretty average Seattle families. But what they did was exceptional.

Their projects and activities — more than 40 for each family — will help reduce global warming, conserve energy, save water, reduce toxics, prevent waste and improve their homes' indoor air quality.

Most importantly, they demonstrate that we can all do these things.

They had a few advantages, of course. In addition to all the free **green** products the show provided, both families were ably assisted by two Seattle contractors who donated their time: Steve Fradkin, of Fradkin Fine Construction, for the Willisess, and Robert Burns, of Envision Homes, for the Petersons. Each contractor put in about 40 hours.

Picking a winner proved more challenging than I expected. Each family did so much, and many of their activities and projects were not directly comparable. One thing making it easier for me was that both families felt they had already won, by getting all the free work and **green** products.

The best projects

In the end, some of the most mundane projects impressed me the most. For conserving energy, the Willisess' attic insulation project was huge. And it should pay for itself in less than two years.

At the Petersons' house, they installed a spiffy new attic hatch that prevents a lot of heat from escaping. That will likely pay for itself in a couple years as well.

I also liked the new cork floor in the Petersons' master bedroom, which replaced a carpet. When you have less carpeting in your home, you often have better indoor air quality, since carpets collect dust. The cork flooring also looks great.

Near and dear to my heart was the Willisess' emphasis on decluttering their home and reducing their consumption. If America ever intends to lead the world in reducing global warming, we'll need to start by buying less stuff.

The most encouraging thing was seeing both families' kids get so involved — even the teenagers, not always an easy crowd.

Will "green" reality TV shows like this one be just another short-lived trend? Perhaps. But don't expect the environmental ethic in America to fade away. In fact, I think it will only grow stronger. In 10 years, I hope that what the Willisess and Petersons did will no longer seem unusual. It will just be the way we live.

Tom Watson: tom.watson@metrokc.gov, 206-296-4481 or www.KCecoconsumer.com

Copyright © 2007 The Seattle Times Company



enlarge BETTY UDESEN / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Thanks to the new hot-water recirculating system, Stephanie and the rest of the Willis family no longer waste water while waiting for it to get hot.

Related

[Seattle families "green up" for a national TV audience](#)

Going eco-friendly

Here are the major projects each family tackled, along with the estimated costs and the estimated annual cost savings of each.

The Peterson house

Energy-efficient refrigerator: Cost: \$3,599. Estimated annual benefit: \$50.
Energy-efficient microwave: Cost: \$269. Benefit: \$50.
Energy-efficient dishwasher: Cost: \$1,429. Benefit: \$50.
Four dual-flush toilets: Cost: \$3,500. Benefit: \$183.
Cork flooring for master bedroom: Cost: \$1,500. Benefit: cleaner indoor air.
Energy-efficient washer/dryer: Cost: \$1,948. Benefit: \$50.
Tight-sealing attic hatch: Cost: \$328. Benefit: \$160.
Compact fluorescent light bulbs: Cost: \$250. Benefit: \$464.
Energy-efficient chest freezer: Cost: \$319. Benefit: \$249.
Tankless water heater: Cost: \$1,500. Benefit: \$150.
Plants for organic gardening: Cost: \$200. Benefit: grocery savings.
Total spending: \$14,842
Total estimated annual savings: \$1,406
 In addition, the Petersons installed a rain barrel in the yard and installed low-flow shower heads and faucet aerators.

The Willis house

Extensive cleaning and decluttering: Cost: \$0. Estimated annual benefit: cleaner indoor air.
Blow-in attic insulation: Cost: \$1,000. Benefit: \$600.
Insulating honeycomb window blinds: Cost: \$1,400. Benefit: \$100.
Custom fireplace door: Cost: \$1,700. Benefit: \$150.
Custom French side doors with double-pane windows: Cost: \$5,000. Benefit: \$75.
Energy-efficient lighting fixtures: Cost: \$1,500. Benefit: \$688.
Hot water recirculator: Cost: \$300. Benefit: \$50.
Total spending: \$10,900
Total estimated annual savings: \$1,663
 In addition, the Willisess installed low-flow shower heads, installed a rain barrel in the yard and did major caulking and weather-stripping throughout the house.
 Source: Screaming Flea Productions