

A natural fit: Hillcrest the right builder for woman's unusual project

By Mark Sherry

When a person with vision and creativity is looking to build a special home, they seek out a special builder with vision and creativity to match.

Catherine Bey and Hillcrest Builders are a perfect fit for one another.

Bey said she has been thinking for a number of years now about building a highly energy efficient home. Those plans were put on hold for a while when her husband passed away in 2008, but about a year ago she renewed her efforts to make her dream a reality.

She said she took a look at a number of potential builders to do her project, but soon came to the realization that Hillcrest Builders was the right company for her. "They were extremely interested and knowledgeable," Bey said.

What she and Hillcrest Builders have been planning for close to a year might very well be a unique project in Wisconsin. Together they are aiming to construct an "age in place" residence for Bey to spend the rest of her years—but it will be so much more than that.

Going for the Platinum

They also are aiming to make this a LEED Platinum home, of which there are only two or three in the state currently. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design and is viewed as the leading measure of "green" construction.

LEED has several levels of certification, and several years ago Hillcrest Builders constructed a Silver rated home in the Plymouth area for a customer. Oyvind Solvang of Hillcrest Builders said Bey's home will go well beyond the features in that home and should be self-sustaining in terms of its energy consumption—quite possibly even producing more energy than it needs at times.

This home should be so unusual that Bey said she wants to open it up to area teachers, students and others to tour and study as a shining example of what home building and energy efficiency can look like both now and in the future.

"I really like the technology," Bey said. "I've always followed it. I really just want to be a steward to the environment."

Along the way, Bey is chronicling her experiences in building this home in a journal. Ground will not be broken until this spring and already she has 85 pages of information, observations and photos in her journal. "96 percent of this project is thinking and looking at all alternatives and a lot of brainstorming," she said.

Hillcrest's experience helps

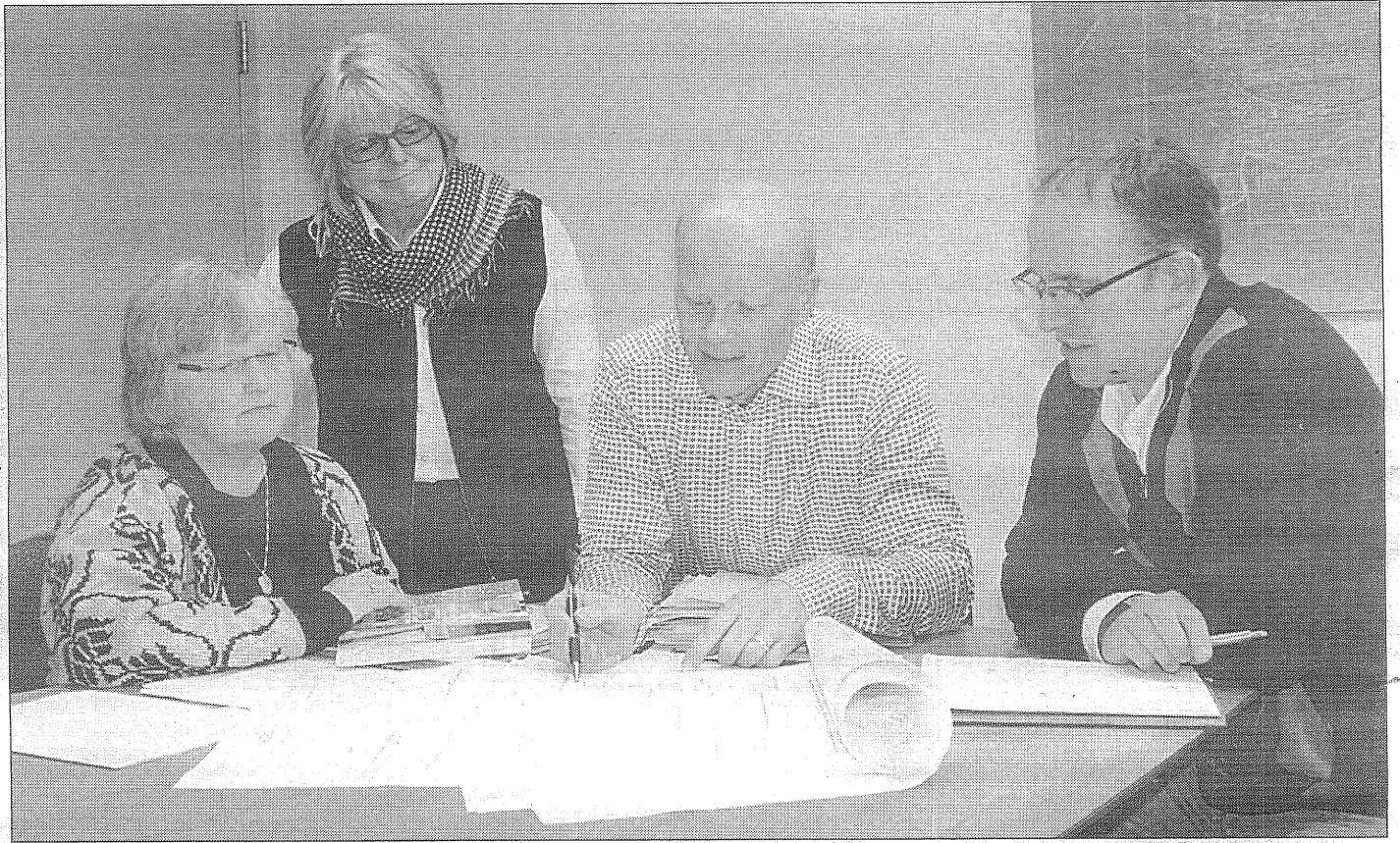
That is why having an experienced, dependable and top-quality builder such as Hillcrest Builders is so valuable. While Hillcrest is consulting with expert subcontractors in some of the cutting-edge energy applications which will be part of Bey's home, they have enough experience in all areas of green building and construction that none of Bey's plans and dreams are causing them to flinch.

Hillcrest Builders and Bey are considering installing four separate systems to heat, cool and power her home:

- A wind turbine on the 5.56-acre property would produce 10 to 20 kw of electricity, a good portion of what the home will require.

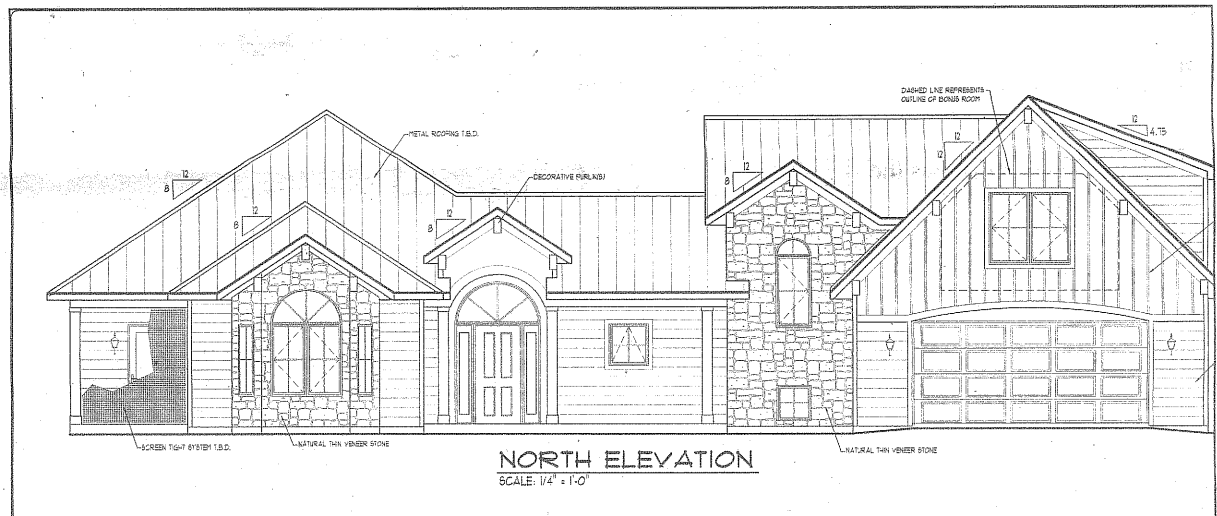
- Photovoltaic solar panels will generate electricity at times when the wind is not spinning the turbine.

- A hot water solar system could be the primary heat source for the home.



When Catherine Bey (seated, left) decided to pursue her dream of building a state-of-the-art home in terms of being environmentally and ergonomically friendly, she decided Hillcrest Builders was the right builder for her. Here she goes over plans with Hillcrest owner Oyvind Solvang (seated, center) and Hillcrest's Mary (Jaberg) Liebetrau and Tim Manthey. Below is the view of how the front of the home will look.

Mark Sherry photo



- Cooling will come from a geothermal pump system, powered by the electricity created by the wind turbine and the solar panels.

Hillcrest Builders and Bey are in the final stages of analyzing the cost of these systems vs. the gain, but Bey remains committed to trying to eliminate energy as one of the fixed costs this fixed-income homeowner would have. She has even created vision and mission statements for Catching Peaceful Breezes Estate, the name she has given the property near the intersection of CTH J and CTH C in the Town of Plymouth. She said her vision is to "Foster interest in education and acceptance in the areas of renewable energy and efficiency, environmental awareness and sensitivity, personal safety, security and mental stimulation in everyday living." Her mission includes incorporating "the best, within budget, of technological ideas and philosophies in renewable energy resources."

The home—described as "quaint bungalow meets modern country"—is even being designed with education in mind. A loft will be constructed above the garage which will serve as both a guest residence as well as having space to be a small classroom for visiting students.

While Bey is being generous in her plans to open her home for study, she said she has not lost sight of the fact that it will be her residence for years to come.

"I need to have it as maintenance-free as possible," she said. Solvang added that the home also will be a model of an ergonomically built home for older people who plan and hope to live independently for as long as possible.

Will do jobs big and small

Hillcrest Builders does not have to build people a new home to make a place ergonomically or environmentally friendlier. The company will do jobs of all shapes and sizes, from installing new energy efficient windows and doors to remodeling kitchens and bathrooms for homeowners in their 20s or their 80s. While most of Hillcrest Builders' work is done in the Sheboygan/Manitowoc/Calumet area, they have traveled from Milwaukee to Green Bay to do projects big and small, simple or intricate.

One big project Solvang said he hopes is ready to take off is the Kieland Meadows subdivision in Kiel. While development of that subdivision started at a difficult time for the housing market, Solvang said the housing dip will not last forever and Hillcrest Builders remains poised to build new homes in this natural setting on Kiel's far southwest side.

A ranch spec home currently is being constructed in Kieland Meadows and should be completed within the next couple months. Solvang said the home and others which can be built there are

"very affordable for someone who wants to be in a new home." Once the spec home is completed, people are invited to call Hillcrest Builders at (920) 526-3439 to get a look inside.

In addition to being a builder, Hillcrest also is a full-service realty company. It can simply sell existing homes for people, or it can combine the two features and put together a package for people who are looking to sell an existing home before they build a new one. Hillcrest will make needed improvements to the existing home to try to help it sell more rapidly. Oftentimes that just means some new paint, better staging or perhaps some simple landscaping projects. "It's really important, and we're really good at it," he said. "We try to work our selections from our selection center and our professionals into that."

"We're optimistic. I think things are going to pick up this spring, especially in the affordable lines and in the specialty projects," Solvang added.

Projects do not get much more special than the home Hillcrest is building for Bey. They plan to have the home ready in time for public viewing in September.

Bey has even named the home: Sól Njord. Sól is the Norse sun goddess, while Njord is the Norse god of wind. It is a fitting name for a Norseman who is about to harness both sun and wind to power a new home.