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## Housing Visions, residents reap rewards of green-home construction

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SYRACUSE — The benefits of green building don't evaporate after the last pieces of drywall are in place for a Central New York nonprofit housing organization.

They trickle down long after work is complete, according to Benjamin Lockwood, the director of development at Housing Visions, a 501(c)(3) that focuses on revitalizing neighborhoods by building and managing affordable housing. The Syracuse-based organization has been building all its homes to meet federally backed Energy Star efficiency standards for about the last four years, he says.

"Not only are we building them, we're managing them," Lockwood says. "The more sustainable the products can be, the less it's going to cost to operate them as they age."

Housing Visions typically installs power-saving equipment like tankless water heaters and efficient heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning systems, he continues. It pays attention to details during construction.

For example, the organization makes sure buildings have proper drainage, eliminating the possibility that water damage could lead to future energy losses. And, it invests in airtight walls, windows, and doors.

"Our buildings are sealed so tightly now that we introduce ventilation into the buildings to ensure that we're getting the proper amount of airflow into them," Lockwood says.

The nonprofit received a 2012 Energy Star Leadership in Housing Award from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in April for building more than 200 Energy Star-certified units since 2010. It has built 206 Energy Star-certified units since that year — 78 in Syracuse, 58 in Oswego, 33 in Rome, and 37 in Utica.

The energy-efficient homes benefit both Housing Visions and its residents, according to Lockwood. The organization estimates that the power-saving units it built since 2010 will save their residents a total of more than \$92,000 on utility bills.

"If you can save someone 20, 30, 40 percent on their energy bills, and they're low income, that's a huge savings," Lockwood says.

Housing Visions started to invest heavily in green building after the state Division of



PHOTO COURTESY OF HOUSING VISIONS

**Housing Visions construction workers on the roof of a housing project. The Syracuse-based organization has been building all its homes to meet federally backed Energy Star efficiency standards for about the last four years**

Housing and Community Renewal, which provides some funding for the organization, launched a green-building initiative in 2007, according to Lockwood. That initiative prompted the Syracuse-based organization to work to build units that meet Energy Star standards.

Now, the nonprofit is aiming for one of its current projects to achieve U.S. Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) platinum certification, the highest of four LEED levels. The project is an \$8.1 million, 50-unit apartment building for homeless veterans slated for the former Jewish Community Center on East Genesee Street in Syracuse.

Housing Visions plans to pursue LEED certification for the project because, at 45,000 square feet, the facility will be larger than a typical home the organization builds. Most of the time, it builds homes to a LEED level, but opts not to apply for certification.

"We generally build to a very high standard," Lockwood says. "But the cost to get LEED certification generally outweighs any plaque you'd get."

Housing Visions was founded in 1990 and is based in about 7,500 square feet of space it owns at 1201 E. Fayette St. in Syracuse. Its other offices include locations in Oswego,

Utica, Rome, and Cortland.

The organization completes between 60 and 100 units every year, Lockwood estimates. About half of the units it finishes are rehabilitated existing structures, and half are new construction, he says.

Between 85 and 100 people work at Housing Visions, depending on the number of projects it has active. Its employment levels have steadily increased since eight years ago, when it had 15 to 20 workers, according to Lockwood.

The nonprofit's employees include construction workers who work on its projects. However, it also uses labor from outside contractors, and it turns to outside consultants to draw architectural designs.

Housing Visions has between 30 and 40 employees working in Syracuse, and it generated \$14 million in revenue in 2011, according to Lockwood. It is projecting revenue will grow to between \$16 million and \$18 million in 2012, he says.

Revenue sources include developer fees and fees associated with property management, Lockwood says. In addition, the organization specializes in low-income housing tax credits. □

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