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#### Build green:

Tuesday, August 26, 2008  
BY KEITH COLEMAN

W

hile there is a perception in New Jersey that building green is a relatively new phenomenon, its main tenets -- the minimization of waste, improved energy efficiency, efficient use of resources and recyclability -- are concepts that have been widely embraced by successful building materials dealers for decades.

Many of the veterans in the New Jersey Building Materials Dealers Association think back to the 1970s, when ecology awareness and the rising cost of oil were popular topics of discussion. Customers began asking how to make their homes more energy-efficient through the use of new and different building materials.

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We were impressed by those who took green building to the extreme, constructing "Earth ships" -- homes built with old tires filled with dirt. A few of these "ships" still exist, amazingly, tucked alongside roads in Sussex County and down in the Pinelands.

While the 1970s was an era of some hits (and many, many misses), it required dealers to seek materials that focused not just on functionality, quality and unit price. We had to include energy efficiency to the mix, explaining to our customers the long-term savings and value of using these products, rather than only the dollars and cents on the initial invoice.

Green building has certainly experienced its growing pains over the years. There have been many attempts, for example, to perfect the solar home. Lowered oil prices in the early 1990s created a shift away from green building, though many progressive builders remained resolute and are now leading a reinvigorated movement.

As we prepare for a new decade, with record energy prices in New Jersey and beyond, we are entering a golden era for green building. The trend is projected to grow as a share of the overall residential market from just 2 percent in 2005 to between 12 percent and 20 percent in 2012, according to research presented at the National Green Building Conference in New Orleans. That's an industry increase from \$7 billion in 2005 to between \$40 billion and \$70 billion in 2012.

This surge is coming not only from environmentalists, but from typical families who want relief from high energy bills.

Lumber remains the original "green" material, as it is natural, biodegradable, cost-effective, plentiful, renewable, reusable, easy to work with, and helps a home "breathe" throughout the seasons.

There are some other green building basics that will greatly improve the performance of a house:

**GREEN WINDOWS AND DOORS**The common rule of thumb is to select products with good insulation value, such as double- and triple-paned windows and doors with insulating foam cores. Greener windows also have insulating gas (such as argon) between the panes, which insulates better than air. In addition, most windows are available with virtually invisible glass

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coatings, called "Low-E," which reflect radiant heat and provide UV protection.

The best brands of windows and doors not only provide insulation through the glazing (or glass area), but also around the movable parts (sash) of the window or door to minimize air infiltration. The best glazing in the world is useless if air leaks between the sash and the frame.

**BUILDING MATERIALS**Incorporating materials that are effective, durable, sustainable and nontoxic is the goal. Consumers can ask their building materials dealers about how bamboo, cork, cotton insulation and recycled glass countertops can lessen their impact on the environment. Other materials, such as no- or low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paints and stains and formaldehyde-free cabinets, can help improve indoor air quality.

**TECHNOLOGY OF THE FUTURE**Geothermal heating and cooling systems pull warm or cool air from the earth and pump it into the house for a natural HVAC system. Solar panels can generate enough electricity on a sunny day to allow a homeowner to sell power back to his or her electric company. While these investments involve a high initial price tag, eventually the savings will cover their cost.

Remodeling to reduce our carbon footprint and to save money on energy costs is an idea whose time has come.

*Keith Coleman owns Hamilton Building Supply in Hamilton.*

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