



Times-Mirror Photo/Greg Nash

Carter Morrow, right, of Bay Homes, explains the solar-powered houses he's building in Round Hill to Lovettsville resident Tony Noerpel, a member of the Loudoun County Committee for a Sustainable Society, Sunday at an open house.

Builder goes boldly into solar power

BY SHANNON SOLLINGER
Times-Mirror Staff Writer

Carter Morrow is going where no builders – or very few – have gone before.

His Round Hill West subdivision offers a full solar-power package to buyers who want it – a roof that looks like any other but generates up to four kilowatts of electricity, and solar-heated hot water.

Several hundred people trooped through a finished product from Bay Homes on Harmon Lodge Way on Round Hill's Main Street over the weekend. Many were intrigued by the solar power, and several have made dates to come back and talk some more, Morrow said.

Round Hill West is made up of 30 half-acre lots on the west side of town. Morrow and his partners – developer Mike Hummel and solar-power expert Alden Hathaway – say they hope eight to 10 buyers will include the optional solar package, which costs about \$70,000. He is also building on two more lots of the Historic Main Street subdivision.

Even without the solar, the houses are designed to be energy-sparing, Morrow said. Blown-in cellulose insulation in the walls will be rated R21, nearly twice what the code requires. Attic insulation – Morrow calls it the house's "hat" – is R40, and he caulked the top plates of all the walls to prevent heated air from escaping.

Fireplaces don't use up and throw away heated air from the house. And the houses are placed on the lots to maximize energy efficiency – fewer and smaller windows on the north side, landscaping that protects the north side from winter winds but lets sunlight in on the south in winter.

And the development is environmentally friendly – trees are saved or moved, not cut down. Runoff water is absorbed on the lot as much as possible. Wetlands and stream valleys are preserved.

"I believe you can be a builder and an environmentalist," Morrow said. "I think when you can save the trees, you sell the house for more. I can't fathom why you don't keep the big trees where you can."

When he built a new home for his Round Hill neighbor, Mike Hummel, Morrow changed the design to save a massive oak tree in the front yard.

That model is now dubbed "The Oak," and a buyer can add

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Carter Morrow
builder

the solar package. The four bedroom, three-full-bath home, about 3,000 square feet, will sell in the low \$600,000 range.

Hummel is on board with Bay Homes as the developer. Hillsboro resident Hathaway, director of EcoPower Programs for the Environmental Resources Trust in Washington, D.C., is partnering to explain and promote the solar package.

In 2011, when state-imposed caps come off electricity rates in Virginia, Hathaway told a looker Sunday at the open house, "There are big hikes coming. The cost of putting in renewable energy is less than the hidden cost of doing business as usual."

The federal government will give a tax credit up to \$2000 for putting in solar power.

Hathaway built solar-powered electricity, solar-heated water and geothermal-heating into his Solar Patriot home in Hillsboro. His average electric bill over the last year was \$35 a month, and \$11 of that is a connection fee, unrelated to how much power he takes off the grid.

And he's cut the amount of carbon he spews into the atmosphere by 50 percent.

Under Virginia's net metering law, his electricity provider must credit him for the extra kilowatts he puts back into the sys-

tem. On sunny days his meter runs backward.

Morrow calls his approach "hybrid house technology," which he likens to the Toyota Prius. His Prius, combination electric battery and gas engine, averages 50 miles per gallon.

"With gas at \$2.50 a gallon and more, I'll save \$40,000 to \$50,000 over the life of the car. I can buy each of my three daughters a brand-new Prius with the money I've saved (compared to an all-gasoline minivan that gets 25 miles to the gallon)."

His houses combine solar energy and a propane furnace to take up the slack when needed. The solar package includes battery storage for solar-generated power that isn't used right away.

Morrow grew up in Burke and followed his father and grandfather into the building industry after he graduated from St. Lawrence University in Canton, N.Y. After 20 years working for some of the area's biggest builders, he decided to strike out on his own. He wanted, he said, to keep buyers happy, not engineer ways to get out of the warranties and not fix defects.

He's built five homes in Round Hill, and his neighbors elected him to Town Council. His buyers are his neighbors and his constituents.

"I live in this town and I'm not leaving," Morrow said.



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WEATHER

Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
High 39/Low 22	High 44/Low 32	High 45/Low 25	High 39/Low 23	High 45/Low 30