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This green house

Jewish family has first gold-certified eco-friendly house in southwestern PA

by Mike Zoller

Associate Editor

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The Letwin's house is the first house in southwestern Pennsylvania to be gold-certified for the environment. All of

their appliances in the kitchen, including the washer and dryer, are environmentally friendly. Chronicle photo by Mike Zoller

Going “green” is a trend sweeping the nation. Major corporations and businesses are altering their business models so that they can call themselves environmentally friendly.

One Pittsburgh family is doing its part by building southwestern Pennsylvania’s first gold-certified green house.

Jeff and Roberta Letwin’s house in Somerset at Frick, a community in Squirrel Hill, was completed in early March and is green from top to bottom.

Approached by the builders, Montgomery & Rust Inc., to build a gold-certified house, the Letwins liked the idea to do their part for the environment.

“We want to make our contribution to the environment and create an energy efficient home,” Jeff said.

At the time, Roberta, who is a Chronicle employee, didn’t even know their house would be the first in the region.

“I wanted to do it for Montgomery & Rust because they asked us to do it,” Roberta said. “It sounded like a good idea. I didn’t realize we were going to be the first green house either.

“But when they presented us the idea, I really wanted to do something for the environment,” she added.

Gold-certified houses aren’t offered by many builders, according to Mark Rust, a principal at Montgomery & Rust Inc.

“It’s a way to distinguish us as a builder in the marketplace,” Rust said. “There aren’t a whole lot of others in the Pittsburgh area that are building green. You read a lot about green building, it’s not a fad. It’s where things are going. It’s the right thing to do.”

Even though the house is gold-certified, Mark said there weren’t many changes in the building process.

The house was put under strict environmental tests based on federal regulations and after passing received its gold-certified certificate.

“The only thing we really changed was the documentation process,” he said. “We didn’t change the way we built that house versus any other of our homes. We didn’t fundamentally change the way we built the house.”

Jeff and Roberta’s house has lots of little differences that many people

wouldn’t even realize just by walking in.

“Some of the more noticeable changes are the two zone heating,” Jeff said. “We don’t have to heat the whole house. We don’t have to burn as much energy.

“Most of the other things are things you don’t think about. A majority of the materials are made from recyclables. It’s not stuff you are constantly thinking about.”

One thing visitors will notice when they use the bathroom is the two-flush toilet, designed to use less water, and the instantly hot water coming from the sink.

“The Letwins put in a circulating pump,” Rust said. “They are not wasting water, waiting for water to get hot. It’s constantly circulating and the water tank is on anyways.”

While the inner workings of the house are all environmentally friendly, the Letwin’s appliances are also

green-certified.

From the kitchen to the laundry room, all of the appliances had to meet certain standards. One thing Roberta noted was that while shopping for appliances and other equipment for the house, she had to make sure they were properly certified.

“It made shopping a little bit more

difficult,” she said. “We had to make sure we were in the parameters of being green. We still had enough choices to make our house look nice, it wasn’t a really big problem.”

Roberta had help from Bethany Demi, an interior designer with Lami Grubb Architects. Demi helped Roberta get the house looking the way she wanted, while keeping it green.

Living in their house for a couple weeks now, the Letwins are happy with their “green” dwelling and are glad they took the extra step in helping the environment.

“I wouldn’t have changed a thing in building this house,” Roberta said. “It’s great for us, it’s great for the environment and I hope more houses like this are built in the future.”

Montgomery & Rust are currently not working on any other gold-certified green houses, Rust said, but hopes to have more done in the near future.

“We will probably have our next single family model home certified,” he said. “We intend to do more and build green houses for years to come.”

(Mike Zoller can be reached at mikez@thejewishchronicle.net.)

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