

Big investment results in big savings

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Bill Harrison's house looks like most others in Greenhorn Creek. But take one look at his energy bills and the pale pink of the stucco might as well be an eternal green.

Thanks to an almost invisible remodel conducted while his house was still in construction, Harrison's one-story, 2,100-square-foot home has the energy bill of something a fraction of its size.

Harrison pays an average of \$150 a month on propane, a fraction of the cost his neighbors face.

Overall, in the three years since he and his wife, Pat, moved in, he's saved just over \$7,000 versus his neighbors' rates.

"I thought the payback would be about seven years," he said. He's on pace for five and-a-half.

The savings haven't come at the price of comfort. Harrison says that, with the exception of a few hot summer days when the mercury inside creeps up to about 75, he keeps the thermostat at 70 degrees 24 hours a day.

Instead, about \$12,000 worth of retrofits are responsible.

A former electrical contractor, Harrison managed the contracting for the construction of his home three years ago.

Among those he hired was Tom Danielson, who runs a construction and energy management company specializing in energy retrofits, insulation and heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems.

Harrison had only the latter in mind, but that quickly changed.

"He convinced me — and what a wise choice I've made," Harrison said.

About a third of the money went to sealing up every crack in the house, be they around windows, wall sockets or light fixtures.

"It's all simple, cheap stuff," said Danielson.

The other major portion went to filling the as yet un-sheetrocked walls with an cellulose-based insulation that Harrison said resembled "ground-up blue jeans."

The material allows air to flow, but holds temperatures well, according to Danielson.

The rest of Harrison's home is just stock from the contractor — the home next door is nearly identical in square footage — but those changes were enough for a radical difference in bills.

"It's basically just home performance 101," Danielson said.