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Avtec Homes' new Eco-Star package cuts its homes' average power usage in half

BY ANNE STRAUB
FOR FLORIDA TODAY

Avtec Homes has an answer for homeowners tired of high energy bills.

The company's new Eco-Star package combines an extensive list of features to slash the typical home's power usage in half. "Over half the energy used in the average household is wasted. The Earth doesn't have energy to waste," said Avtec builder Larry Sietsma.

The payoff comes in the satisfaction of contributing to a better environment, as well as lower bills. Sietsma ought to know. "Ninety percent of my hot water is free," Sietsma said. He installed a solar-powered water heater 33 years ago, lopping at least \$30 a month off his power bill. He estimates his total savings over time at more than \$10,000.

Eco-Star is Avtec's response to the U.S. Department of Energy challenge to builders to build high performance homes. According to the DOE rating system, a typical existing home registers 130 on the Home Energy Rating Service, or HERS scale. The government wants builders to cut that to 70 HERS.

Avtec goes a step further, reducing its HERS score to 50. The builder works with the Florida Solar Energy Center to reduce energy use and verify its data.

Eco-Star includes an 80-gallon solar water heater, probably the biggest energy saver in the package, Sietsma said. "In Florida, it's a crime not to let the sun heat your water," he said. That feature alone earns the homeowners a \$2,100 credit on their income tax return.

Among the additional features included:



Photo by Casey DeCotis for FLORIDA TODAY

This Avtec Homes model home in West Melbourne's Manchester Lakes showcases many of the Eco-Star package features, which are available in every Avtec Home.

- ✿ **Radiant heat barrier.** Located under the roof, the barrier reflects heat back.
- ✿ **Attic ventilator fans.** Solar-powered fans expel hot air from the

attic. R-38 ceiling insulation protects the conditioned part of the home. Walls include high-efficiency insulation and use double furring strips

- ✿ **High-efficiency air conditioner.** A SEER rating of 15 keeps air cool with lower

energy use. The unit is located in conditioned space.

- ✿ **Digital programmable thermostat.** By programming
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Eco-Star

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the temperature, homeowners can save energy use for when they're home to enjoy it. "If you do it manually, you forget," Sietsma said.

Homes also come with a computerized energy monitor that tracks the home's real-time energy usage. If the monitor shows that use is high, homeowners can examine their habits and adjust.

The package is included in Avtec Homes, along with a free \$10,000

in options. Potential buyers can see many of the features in the builder's new model, the Constellation 4, in Manchester Lakes in West Melbourne.

The model is priced at \$178,900 and covers 1,927 square feet under air conditioning. It includes three bedrooms, two bathrooms and an imagination room, which can be used for a variety of purposes.

Avtec is able to customize. "If there's something they feel is important in their home, we will modify the plan," said Gail France, new-home

sales consultant for Avtec. Eco-Star is available in any Avtec Home.

At Manchester Lakes, Avtec homes range from 1,322 to 2,175 square feet and cost \$148,900 to \$188,900.

"You're going to save money on energy, you're going to protect the environment, reduce carbon emissions, preserve quality of life for future generations," Sietsma said.

"Somewhere along the line we have to change, and I think it's time," Sietsma said. **HF**



Photo by Casey DeCotis for FLORIDA TODAY

Gail France, new-home sales consultant for Avtec Homes.