

TO SONOMA WEST TIMES
FROM: NATALIE ROGERS
FOR: GUEST COMMENTARY (Or any other appropriate place in the Times)

Title: “Energy Optimizing” My Home

Having read the front page story of the Times, March 17th on Green Goals and objectives by George Snyder, and the page 3 story showing Council Members Larry Robinson and Kathleen Shaffer stuffing bags to leave on our doorsteps educating us about energy saving tips, I would like to tell my success story of “Energy Optimizing” my home in Sebastopol.

Larry originally sent me information on the exceptional program Sonoma County offers under the Sonoma County Energy Independence Program, (SCEIP). Our county is fortunate to have one of two such programs in California. Essentially, our county government gives us a loan to retrofit (my contractor prefers the words “Energy Optimize”) our homes. This loan covers all the costs of such work by giving us a 20 year loan at 7% that is added to our property tax to be paid twice a year. This deal was too good to turn down! Not only would I end up with a more comfortable home by tightening all the air leaks and adding insulation and an energy efficient furnace, I would also be doing my part to help green Sebastopol and the planet.

It was a great experience! First, David Willson of Advanced Home Performance (Sebastopol) came to assess the leakage in my home. What an interesting experience as he and his colleague opened my back door and temporarily installed a tight fitting plastic door with a huge blower and a computer. After sealing off the fireplace and closing the windows, the strong blower pushes the air out of the house, thus dramatically showing where the air is leaking into the house. I have 17 light cans (recessed lights in the ceiling). I watched as strings of dust came dangling down from each light can, telling us that a large amount of heat was escaping through these light fixtures into the attic. Part of their equipment was a fancy infrared camera that shows where air is flowing in from the attic or ceiling cans or elsewhere.

In their lingo, they are testing infiltration/exfiltration both before and after “energy optimizing” my home.

The goal was to provide a comfortable home and healthy space regarding the temperature, the humidity, noise levels, and the ducted air velocity in the house. This would cut the usage of gas and electricity substantially, thus greening the house/planet.

My house was particularly uncomfortable in the winter with the furnace blowing very noisily with strong gusts of hot air, and then cooling down too fast. The thermostat was fine but the leakage of air and non-efficient furnace was troublesome.

When I watched these men take off each electric wall plate to caulk and seal them I said, “This looks like a very tedious process, seeing you on the floor in each room.” The response, “It is tedious, but we are contributing to saving the planet.”

My loan covered the new energy-efficient furnace, the new light cans with LED lights (also saving electricity) and bringing the insulation in my attic from R 19 to R 45, as well as the costs of labor. Whereas my heating was only 78% efficient, it is now 95% efficient and the heat is quiet and consistent. Advanced Home Performance also did all of the paper work to apply for the SCEIP loan. As I watch my energy bills shrink it I am happy.

My next project is to make my front yard sustainable with the help of my friend and landscape designer, Cathy Taylor and my neighbor Erik Ohlson, of local Permaculture fame. We intend to get rid of the grass and sprinklers and replace it with native, drought resistant plants. The plan allows the rain gutters to empty into the swale thus letting it sink back into the ground aquifer.

Although I have only lived in Sebastopol for 4 years (formerly Santa Rosa) I am feeling a part of my neighborhood and using our local, highly conscious contractors in that process.

Natalie Rogers, Ph.d., is an author and expressive arts teacher/facilitator, artist, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother!