

Legacy Solar Co-op

Share a slice of sun anywhere in Wisconsin!

Ken and Barb make their 100-year old house much more energy efficient

Part I. She's Got a Secret

Ken and Barb are sitting at home after dinner in the evening - together, yet each alone with their thoughts. It turns out Barb has a secret. This was the year that they decided to have an energy audit and give their 100-year old Madison home the energy and efficiency upgrades they've been promising themselves. Their reasons were the typical ones that make it feel like the right decision. They knew it could save them some money and they wanted to do the right thing for the environment, like so many of their neighbors have.

On the recommendation of the auditor they replaced their aging furnace with the latest 92% efficient model with a 2-speed blower and Nest thermostat. The old water heater went (turns out it wasn't vented properly) for a new one with better controls and direct venting. They insulated the entire house with cellulose for a better R-value. Along the way they updated some unsafe electrical wiring and closed some gaps in the foundation that were letting in the wrong sort of wildlife. They both looked at the financial projections from the auditor, seeing that their monthly bills will be lower, and the resale value of the house will increase when it's time to sell. The auditor also informed them that the increased value would not affect the assessed value of the house, so there's no downside to upgrading. All this made Barb feel RIGHT about their decision.

Here's her secret. She also feels really GOOD about the decision for reasons that have nothing to do with money or saving the Earth, as soon as the upgrades were complete. As she is thinking about her shopping trip for the next day, she realizes that for the first-time light bulbs are not on her list. The new LEDs they installed will last more than 20 years. On top of that they come on right away and can be dimmed to any level. Their slightly higher cost will be easily made up in lower electric and replacement cost.

Later, as she is lying in bed she notices that it is quiet. The planes and buses that go by every night are now difficult to hear. It feels like their home has been transported to a quiet place in the country. She can barely hear the furnace when it turns on and can't feel any draft as it gently pours warm air into the room. The temperature is even everywhere in the room and when the fan runs to circulate air it is nearly silent.

She looks at her phone on the bedside table, realizing that she's forgotten to turn down the thermostat before going to bed and she can now do it from under the covers. For all the consideration of costs and payback, carbon footprint and environmental legacy - she realizes that she has a simpler, more pleasant life right now and that alone makes it worthwhile.

She looks across the bed at Ken to see him staring out the window thoughtfully, and she wonders what he's thinking about. It turns out he has a secret too.

Are you thinking of making some energy improvements to your house? Are you in a similar situation as Ken and Barb? Legacy Solar Co-op can do a site assessment for your home and let you know where your opportunities lie - that's relief for the environment as well as your pocketbook. More information at <https://legacysolarcoop.org/consulting/>.

Stay tuned for more from Barb and Ken.