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He Helps Buildings Go Green

Entrepreneur turned beliefs into a business

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MARTY MINCHIN

Scott Spivak has been fighting air pollution for years.

He co-founded Carolinas Clean Air Coalition. He's one of 1,000 people nationwide who are trained to give the presentation made famous in former Vice President Al Gore's documentary "An Inconvenient Truth" about global warming.

Spivak's primary means of reducing air pollution, however, is his business, Environmental Building Solutions in Matthews, which is teaching builders and homeowners how to make houses "green."

"We've decided we're going to use business to make the (air pollution) reductions instead of being activists," Spivak said.

Spivak, who calls himself a "building scientist," has 25 years of experience in the construction business. He also has spent years as part of the environmental movement.

During work to fight ozone problems, Spivak said, he began learning about indoor air pollution.

"It really sparked an interest in me to start building differently," he said. "I realized there is no one doing any green building in our region, and I started to incorporate some green features into homes I was building."

Spivak said he found that construction in this area is pretty conservative, but builders, and home buyers, were very interested in energy efficiency.

"Energy Star building is really differentiating the Energy Star builders from all the other builders, so it's good for markets," Spivak said. "And they end up building better homes."

Energy Star is a government-backed program that helps businesses and individuals protect the environment by increasing energy efficiency. It is widely known by the Energy Star logo, which is often seen on energy-efficient appliances.

Spivak said many people don't know that

whole houses can be labeled Energy Star. His company works with builders to make homes more energy efficient, by doing things such as air-sealing houses and closing crawl spaces.

Energy-efficient building creates a healthier environment inside the house, making for more comfortable living.

'House doctors'

Environmental Building Solutions likes to think of itself as a "house doctor," Spivak says. Employees will audit a home for air quality issues that affect health and energy efficiency. For example, if you've got a room that's unusually hot or cold, or has nasty odors or mold, EBS employees can use diagnostic tests to figure out what's causing the problem and how to fix it.

EBS looks at how the whole house works, including how air from the attic and crawl space is interacting with the rest of the house.

Spivak said EBS recently examined a new house where the builder had been called back 10 times because the fireplace back-drafted so badly.

"(The homeowners) were miserable," Spivak said. "(But) no one had looked at the entire home as a system."

EBS added a fresh-air vent from outside and sealed the house's duct system.

A full-home audit includes carbon monoxide testing, inspecting attics, crawl spaces and heating and air systems, checking doors and depressurizing the house to measure how leaky it is.

Spivak said indoor air pollution problems often stem from faulty duct systems, as they often find duct systems that aren't connected.

EBS also offers a home performance contracting service, which will fix the problems that home audits diagnose.

"We do duct renovation, we do air sealing, we'll close their crawl space," Spivak said.

"We're kind of a one-stop shop."



EBS Auditor performs duct leakage test

An idea that's catching on

Spivak sees "green" building in the Charlotte area as at a tipping point. Green building ideas have been slowly catching on, but Spivak thinks they are about to become more popular.

Some builders already have completely changed their methods, as they recognize that consumers are starting to ask for Energy Star homes, he said.

The more builders that get on board with energy-efficient ideas, the bigger the impact on reducing air pollution.

For Spivak, that means more satisfaction in knowing that he has found a successful way to channel his passion for environmentalism into an industry poised to make significant changes.

"This is what carries me every day," he said. "It'd rather do environmental work 100 percent of the time, but we're having a huge impact, and that brings huge satisfaction."

Environmental Building Solutions

Creating energy efficient and healthy homes

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