

GREEN BUILDING

# Building Women

Strategies and solutions for  
women in the building industry

SPRING 2011

## Carol Cheek

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## PWB members take green certification to the next level

By Amy Martino, AIA, CAASH, LEED-AP

The NAHB Certified Green Professional (CGP) designation recognizes builders, remodelers and other industry professionals who have learned to incorporate green building principles into homes—without driving up the cost of construction. Class work leading to the designation provides a solid background in green building methods.

This spring, NAHB also plans to offer the Master CGP designation for builders and remodelers. That designation delves deeper into the science of green building and project management and includes more stringent experience and home certification requirements.

Glenna Wilson, who owns Charis Homes in Massillon, Ohio; Karen Kassik-Michelsohn, owner/designer of Home Accessibilities by Karen Kassik, Inc., in Anchorage, Alaska, and Winter Park, Fla.; and Melanie Spurgeon, who owns Design Built Homes, Ltd., in Peoria, Ill., all incorporate their CGP designation into their businesses.

### Midwest green

Wilson has been building homes for more than 11 years and established Charis Homes in 2003 with partner Todd Scott, also a CGP. When her son, Jay, a civil engineer in the concrete industry, introduced Charis Homes eight years ago to the idea of using ICF construction, or insulated concrete forms, “this opened our thinking to energy-efficient building,” Wilson remembered. “I did the research and realized I could add green products to the building process that not only saved energy, but were a better product to help build a healthier home for my consumer.”

Both she and her partner obtained their designations in 2008; they were the first to do so in their county. Now, Wilson incorporates green in all her homes.

“We display our designation at our model home and on our marketing material,” she says. “I believe others are looking to us as a leader in green and efficient design.”

Wilson passionately shares her knowledge

and experience with her customers, particularly using the Charis Homes’ website as a green building educational tool. A video about ICFs explains how builders insulate foundations below grade, but typically not above grade. The 18 inches above grade can attribute to 33 percent of heat loss in a home through the foundation. For this reason, every home Wilson builds has an ICF basement—in addition to green features such as low-E, argon-filled windows, low-VOC paint and sustainable carpeting. Creating a warm and dry basement with ICFs adds square footage to the home by creating comfortable and useable spaces.

When she discovers a new green product or technique, she compares the rate of return, benefit and potential increase in the initial cost of the home versus the maintenance and utility savings for the homeowner.

If after her extensive research, a new product seems to make sense, Wilson educates the homeowner about the product, offers to use it at no cost, and then verifies the benefits by testing the home. All Charis Homes have a third-party energy rater perform a HERS (Home Energy Rating Score) test, which produces a score in which 100 represents a home built to the prevailing



Glenna Wilson builds all of her houses with ICF basements

energy code. Lower scores represent a home built with increasing efficiency; the closer to zero, the less energy the home will use. Charis Homes’ houses have received a score of 47 and currently Wilson is striving for a score of 30. That means the houses will be built to be 70 percent more energy efficient than a typical new home.

### Green interiors

Kassik-Michelsohn has been designing custom homes and remodeling existing homes for more than 20 years. In addition to her CGP educational designation,



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Left, Melanie Spurgeon used skills gained from her CGP and CAPS designations to design and build an energy-efficient, accessible house for the family of Jake Grys.



Right, Karen Kassik-Michelson incorporated green and aging-in-place features in this remodeled kitchen.

she is a Certified Aging in Place Specialist (CAPS). The combination of the CGP and CAPS designations provides her with a unique approach and niche: universal and green design and building.

"The CGP teaches us about energy efficiency, healthy materials and how to create a more sustainable environment," she said. "The CAPS designation teaches one how to better understand a person with special needs, thereby creating a more productive communication and level of service. Incorporating the CGP and CAPS designations into a package allows us to enhance our level of service by being better educated."

Kassik-Michelson's partner designed solar-powered and energy-efficient homes in the 1970s, long before green became a household word. "As our market began to change and the desire for energy efficiency became more mainstream, we began specifying more green products and aligning ourselves with others in the market doing the same," she said. Today, "every project we design incorporates some degree of green." The majority of their projects involve high-end remodeling and aging-in-place design, so creating the spaces to be efficient and sustainable is a priority. Affordability is most important—and most challenging—to her.

Kassik-Michelson has learned through experience and by working with her green verifier and field personnel. After moving her mother home to live with her in 2002, she recognized a crucial need in the housing market for accessible design. Her philosophy is a common-sense approach for creating healthier, energy efficient and barrier-free design that promote "beautiful, long-term and flexible home environments," she said. "This is a simple philosophy to utilize in design and construction; it makes good sense for our future."

### Using resources wisely

Spurgeon, CGP, CAPS, grew up in the building industry, playing at her grandfather's job sites and her father's cabinet design company. Her grandfather, Howard Spurgeon, was a widely respected builder in central Illinois. Her

father owned Sunnyland Cabinets, and Melanie Spurgeon learned the fine art of craftsmanship as she worked her way up "from sawdust" to the minute details of kitchen design, she said. Following in her family's footsteps, Spurgeon formed Design Built Homes, Ltd., in 1993 with the mission "to deliver the highest quality and most cost-effective home for clients and by building energy-efficient homes with excellent value" and within the budget.

Spurgeon's green interest centers on reducing waste, recycling and using recycled products. She incorporates advanced framing methods, engineered wood I-joists, carpet with recycled content, and most recently, recycled glass bathroom countertops. She also uses upgraded insulation (R-42 in the roof), tankless water heaters, geothermal heat pumps, low VOC paints and finishes and local products. She also pays particular attention to building orientation, caulking and ensuring a tight building envelope.

Spurgeon uses the knowledge she has gained as a CGP "to distinguish myself in the market and grow the business," and is working to achieve National Green Building Standard certification for all her new homes.

Like Kassik-Michelson, Spurgeon augments her CGP designation with her CAPS designation. Her biggest project to date is a universally designed home in Pekin, Ill., for a family on the television show *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*. Spurgeon led the Design Built Homes team and a vast number of community volunteers. They built the Grys family an energy efficient, accessible home for their youngest son, Jake, who has brittle bone disease and dwarfism. Before the home was built, Jake could not "get a drink, go to the bathroom, turn on a light or even open a door," Spurgeon said. Design features such as a special bathroom so Jake can shower and grow independently make an inspirational, sustainable difference in his life, she said.

### Taking it forward

All three women agree that education is essential in green building. Kassik-Michelson

and Wilson both train and educate suppliers and subcontractors to incorporate green building practices. Wilson does this "on a one-on-one basis, and I also hold a yearly breakfast meeting with suppliers and subcontractors to update them on the industry and the direction the company is heading," she said. In addition, Charis Homes offers an energy and education seminar for its customers every spring and fall.

Last year, Spurgeon teamed up with a local elementary school's fourth and fifth graders to promote atmosphere and energy conservation awareness, recycling and green building with a "Kid-netic Energy" talent show and presentation. This year, she will expand the program and target five schools for the presentation centering on Earth Day and culminating in a fun-filled green scavenger hunt. One benefit: Spurgeon subtly markets her expertise to potential customers while educating children.

So what is the greatest benefit of being a Certified Green Professional?

"Education is power," Spurgeon said. She is one class away from her Certified Graduate Builder designation; her Certified Sales Professional is pending. The designations give her more credibility with her customers and "set you apart," she said.

Kassik-Michelson concurs. "Nothing builds credibility more than knowledge," she said. "I believe the philosophy of green is here to stay. We have all become more aware of efficiency, sustainability and our impact on the environment. I believe it will take a number of years until housing methodologies change completely, but the level of awareness is staggering. Hopefully, environmentally friendly homes combined with universal design features will create the new future of housing." **BW**

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