

# Green building is practical and rewarding

By Michaela Kennedy

Bob and Wendy Crooks from Hull Street have succeeded in showing that proper building design can eliminate the need for heating and cooling in the home. Their new addition, insulated with straw bales, has proven to them and others that "green building" is practical and surprisingly economical.

"It is straw that we used, not hay," Wendy corrects when she hears the term misused. "Hay is an animal food. Straw is hollow. No one eats it." Bob holds out a piece of straw, a natural insulating material, for display. No left-over artificial material to dispose of, either. "Straw is best. You can mulch the land with it," Wendy adds.

As the couple offers a tour of the eco-friendly addition, they point out the charm of the Tuscan finish plastered walls and the deep window sills. The straw bales add thickness to the walls, with another inch and a half to two inches of plaster on top of the insulation. A circle cut in one wall shows off the straw within. "It's a truth window, common in all straw-bale houses," Wendy explains.

A common question asked of the couple is whether they fear the bales will attract insects or mice. With no nutritive value in the straw and no entry point through



Bob and Wendy Crooks relax inside their straw-insulated home. The Crooks have set a benchmark for green home living with their modern design.

Photo by Michaela Kennedy

sealed plaster, the house is clean of critters, Bob notes.

Bamboo floors and a cork kitchen floor add comfort and warmth to the homey atmosphere at the Crooks' house. A wood stove with baseboard hot water backup is the only heating they use. Between the savings in construction costs, as well as the fuel efficient technology, Bob and Wendy are happy to report theirs is an energy-compliant house that fits a limited budget.

Wendy and Bob show the original one-room cottage that stood on the lot before the straw bales arrived. "It was great when I first moved here in 1999," Bob recalls when he started work at the Naval Undersea Warfare Center. In

the last 10 years, Bob married Wendy, an artist, and more living space was needed.

Bob also recalls visiting a friend who built a home many years ago and introduced him to super insulation. A super-insulated house is intended to be heated mainly by intrinsic heat, according to standard definitions in the building industry. Waste heat generated by appliances and the body

heat of the occupants are retained, without using passive solar building design techniques or large amounts of thermal mass, and with very small amounts of back-up heat. "We did 18 months worth of research before even starting," the couple agrees.

The Crooks say their home is still a work in progress. A back closet reveals their test area where they have tried out colors on the wall. They create desired wall colors by mixing a lime wash with pigments, continuing the theme of using natural materials. Bob stresses that no typical paint should be used. "The only thing you can't do is seal them," Bob says. "The walls need to breathe."

Regular paint contains chemicals that would seal off the wall, cutting off the ability for moisture to escape. "People worry about the straw going moldy," Bob notes. "There's no need to worry if air moves through."

Wendy leads the way into an upstairs guest room used for meditation. "We call this the tree

room," she says, pointing to a bay window that captures a view under the umbrella of a sprawling maple tree. The couple smile when they look at the thick plastered window sill, handcrafted by Wendy. She jumped in to experience every step of the project, from packing bales to molding walls. "I wanted to try everything," she laughs. "It was a lot of fun."

Wendy recalls a workman one day who came though the main room and sat down. He looked around and said how nice the room was. "But I kept waiting for him to get up and leave," Wendy laughs. Visitors agree with the couple that something about living green feels good.

The straw bale house has drawn such attention in the state that the Rhode Island Foundation asked the Crooks to speak on a panel about their construction. For more information about green living and their straw bale home, Wendy and Bob invite anyone interested to give them a call at 423-0993.

## Youth book discussion group to read 'Liar'

Freddie's Feed and Read, the Jamestown library's book discussion group for children in grades 4 to 6, will meet next on Tuesday, April 1, from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.

Pre-registration for children and their parents is required.

The book for the April 1 meeting is "Notes from a Liar and her Dog," by Gennifer Choldenko.

For lead character Antonia MacPherson, "Ant" to her friends, lying is a way of life. Antonia is the imperfect middle child in what she sees as a very perfect family. Ant feels so out of it that she is sure that she is adopted and that her "real" parents will be coming to get her any day. She and her best friend Hamilton are misfits at school, too. The only affection Ant seems to get is from Hamilton and her dog Pistachio. When her art teacher takes an interest in Ant, changes are inevitable, not only for Ant but for her family, her real family, as well.

To reserve the book and sign up for this new book discussion group, call the library at 423-7280, visit the library's website [www.jamestownri.com/library](http://www.jamestownri.com/library) or email the children's librarian at [rowenadunlap@gmail.com](mailto:rowenadunlap@gmail.com).

*Mooring service / installations      Dock design / construction*  
*Boat storage / services / Dockage*  
*Retail dock hardware and mooring tackle.*

## Rhode Island Mooring Services, Inc.

**Annual Service & Inspections to Moorings - New Installations**  
**Compliance with "Mooring Location Verification"**  
**for Jamestown 2007 Inspections**

Call for Quotes & Rates  
**Phone: 423-1676 Fax: 295-4718**  
**Email: [rims@rimoorings.com](mailto:rims@rimoorings.com)**  
**[www.rimoorings.com](http://www.rimoorings.com)**

Established 1985

## 30% OFF STOREWIDE!

50% OFF All Clothes

### Midnight Sun on the Wharf

85 Brown St. Wickford • 295-1601 • Open 7 Days

**NEW "ISLAND" CUISINE**  
 Friday & Saturday  
 St. Patrick's Day Specials

- Corned Beef Dinner
- Caribbean Reubens
- Other Irish Specials
- Shepherd's Pie
- Key Lime Pie

• Many New Menu Items

**TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY & THURSDAY**

## \$9.95 DINNER SPECIALS

includes Soup or Salad, Entree, one side, Rum Punch or Sangria

Dinner Tuesday thru Saturday, Lunch Friday and Saturday  
 Closed Sunday & Monday

**14 NARRAGANSETT AVENUE • 423-1490**

*Best Rate in Rhode Island!*  
*And Free ATMs Nationwide\*\**

# EARN

# 6.0% ~~6.0%~~ APY\*

Checking Balances up to \$100,000

**Coin Counter Machines**  
 available in Portsmouth, Tiverton, Middletown, Barrington, and North Kingstown

**Go Checking REWARD! YOURSELF!**

Account Balance	Conditions are met	Conditions are not met
\$0.01 to \$100,000.00	6.06% APY	0.10% APY
\$100,000.01 or more	1.01% APY	0.10% APY

\* 6.06% Annual Percentage Yield (APY) paid on balances between one penny and \$100,000, and 1.01% APY paid on all amounts above \$100,000 each cycle the minimum requirements are met. If you do not meet the requirements per cycle, your account will still function as a free checking account earning 0.10% APY; however, it will not receive ATM refunds for that time period. Rates as of 10/10/07. We may change the interest rate and APY at any time after the account is opened. No minimum balance required. "Qualification cycle" means a period beginning one business day prior to the current statement through one business day prior to the close of the current statement. Deposit minimum of \$25 to open account. Available to personal accounts only. No monthly service charge. \*\* Unlimited ATM refunds if requirements are met each qualification cycle.

Equal Housing Lender
Member FDIC