

## ‘New House’ filming segments in Knoxville Latest DIY show is fresh spin on ‘This Old House’

By Larisa Brass

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East Tennessee is getting its share of green spotlight in a new series scheduled for launch by the DIY Network this July.

“This New House,” produced by former executive producer of PBS’s “This Old House,” and sharing the same host, Kevin O’Connor, stopped in Knoxville last week to film for what will be three segments of an upcoming 13 shows — the local spots will run in the first half of the season, according to O’Connor.



PHOTO BY PAUL EFIRD

From left, Jay Maurer, director of photography, Kevin O’Connor, host of DIY’s “This New House” and Jeff Christian, ORNL building researcher, film an episode of the network’s latest show, “This New House” at the Crossroads at Wolf Creek subdivision in Oak Ridge.

“We’re looking at pretty much any story with what’s new, what’s sexy, what’s up and coming for homes,” O’Connor said. “For me, it’s a great opportunity because there’s a whole body of work that we don’t always talk about in ‘This Old House.’ This is new material, and it’s a great story.”

The magazine-style show, which O’Connor is co-hosting with DIY’s Network’s Amy Matthews, will feature a variety of new housing issues and trends, O’Connor said, including “design, architecture, technology, building processes, appliances (and) energy efficiency.”

DIY Network is owned by Scripps Networks. Scripps’ production operations are based in Knoxville and its corporate headquarters are in Cincinnati.

“This New House” spent time filming a couple of very different types of energy efficient construction projects. First, the crew stopped by Clayton Homes manufacturing plant in Bean Station and its Alcoa sales lot for a feature on Clayton’s modern, green and efficient i-house.

“That could not be more different than the traditional building process,” O’Connor said. “The fact that these guys are building these in a factory and doing things in five days or a week.”

The film crew also stopped by the Knoxville Habitat for Humanity ReStore, where the non-profit homebuilder sells low-cost home and building supplies, typically donated by local retailers and contractors as well as individuals.

“This New House” spent Thursday getting the down and dirty tour of four Oak Ridge homes built by the Zero Energy Building Research Alliance, a partnership that includes Knoxville-based Schaad Companies, Oak Ridge National Laboratory, the Department of Energy and TVA. The homes feature different structures and technologies, heavily monitored by ORNL, that should render the homes — which eventually will be sold to regular homebuyers — about 60 percent more efficient than traditional new construction.



ORNL’s Jeff Christian served as host and tour guide, as the crew toured the houses in detail, taking in everything from the structural insulated panels, or SIPs, that form two of the homes’ walls to the carefully designed and calibrated plumbing and air conditioning systems to phase-change insulation, which transforms from a solid to a liquid as the outside temperature increases and decreases, shielding the interior from the extremes — a technology that O’Connor said particularly fascinated him.

“There were definitely some things that I had never seen before,” he said. “I didn’t even know such a thing (as phase-change insulation) existed, and I’m seeing it there and it’s not in a laboratory. This is actually in this house performing behind the sheetrock. ... You realize there’s a ton of science going on.”

O’Connor seemed to be a quick study, rattling off facts during an interview as he waited for his plane to depart from McGhee Tyson Airport. “When you work with a really smart scientist guy like Jeff Christian, you get fired up,” he said.

“We looked at these excruciating details ... in each of the four houses,” O’Connor said, admitting, “We probably filmed for eight hours to make five minutes of TV.”

“We have to learn it, so we know the best parts of it to share. Our job really is to expose people to it. ... It’s just a little taste.”

“This New House” will be the first major media exposure for the ZEBRAlliance project, which has been under way since the homes’ groundbreaking in September 2008.

“This helps tell our story of dedication and determination in the relentless pursuit of affordable zero energy houses, from price ranges of \$100,000 to \$600,000,” said Christian in an e-mail following the DIY shoot.

Christian is hopeful the segment will help attract the attention of potential future partners to the research. An official grand opening for the homes is expected later this year.

As for the new show, O’Connor and Matthews are shooting across the country, visiting manufacturers as diverse as a plumbing company that makes bathroom retrofits for baby boomers, a company using beetle-blighted forests in Colorado to make wood pellets for heating and a PVC siding firm.

While green is definitely the hot topic in the construction business these days, the show is careful not to lean too heavily on the trend, O’Connor said.

The series is “definitely going to have lots of efficiency and lots of green stories,” he said, “but we’re fighting hard to have a balance and not too many of those. It’s too overdone. There’s a lot of people out there that are faking it.”

Larisa Brass is a freelance contributor to the News Sentinel.

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