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BEYOND THE GREEN

Pathway Design & Construction Helps Create Truly Healthy Homes

by Ann Dorn

For Paul Kocharhook and Doug Kennedy, of Pathway Design & Construction, thinking green is only part of the solution to building truly healthy homes. Instead, they go “beyond the green,” building Earth-friendly dwellings that are well ventilated and free of allergenic environmental contaminants, or triggers, that cause reactions and symptoms in susceptible individuals.

“Most of our clients seek us out because they have an interest in sustainability, as well as allergies or chemical sensitivity issues,” Kocharhook says. As the owner of the design-and-build construction and remodel firm, he traces his passion for healthy homes to his previous experience in sustainable construction that lasted more than a decade.

A Mission-Driven Company

Kocharhook’s Pathway team members share his commitment. In addition to their reputation for customer service and quality craftsmanship, they devote many working hours to educating building professionals and the public about healthy home construction and maintenance. Although the company was founded less than three years ago, it has already garnered several awards for both construction projects and educational leadership.

“Pathway’s belief in green construction and their refusal to do any other kind means first of all, quality,” says Pathway client and Whittier Heights resident Loralee Deshazor. “The other thing I really respect is their time and effort teaching others and bringing other companies on board

with green construction.”

The company’s educational outreach includes speaking in an array of settings, both private and public. Pathway has also advised the production team of a television series, *The House that Saved the World*, which is currently being submitted to PBS for consideration. In addition, the firm was part of the team that helped rewrite the *Built Green Remodeler Handbook* for a Master Builder’s Association program that helps homeowners achieve a more sustainable, healthier home.

The Pathway crew says their livelihood is more than a job—it’s a way to make the world a better place. “The impact that our homes have on our children is really important to me,” say Kocharhook. “We’re starting to see increases in childhood asthma and other illnesses, and they are directly related to the lifestyles we’re living.”

Healthy Homes Are for Everyone

Kocharhook believes healthy homes are important for everyone, not just those with chemical sensitivities. According to the *Journal of Allergy and Clinical Immunology*, mold, allergens like pet dander, particles of wood, paper, pesticides tracked in from outdoors and even tire “dust” or fragments in the air are among the contaminants that may be linked to shortness of breath, allergic skin reactions, nausea, fatigue and asthma.

“I think many people don’t realize why they wake up in the morning with a stuffy nose or crusty eyes,” Kocharhook says. “There could be environ-



This Ballard addition includes a living roof, rainwater catchment system and the use of FSC lumber.

mental reasons why this is happening, and it could be related to poor ventilation or contaminants and chemical exposure." He notes that current medical thought suggests that every body has a threshold for environmental toxins, and compromised indoor air quality may eventually lead some individuals to develop unpleasant symptoms.

"A lot of people don't realize the cost associated with being sick, staying home with sick kids or missing work," he continues. "It's not just about the cost of the remodel, it's about long-term savings and being truly healthy."

"This is all about healing—it's the construction equivalent of preventive health care," explains Kennedy, Pathway operations manager. "Doctors often treat people with symptoms caused

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~ Doug Kennedy

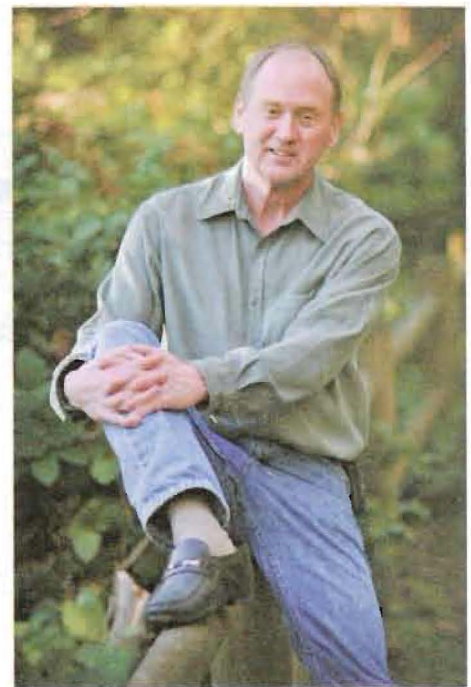
by their environment. By helping to remove the factors that cause illness, we lower medical costs."

A Passion for Improving Quality of Life

Pathway has written a healthy home maintenance manual that is delivered to each client, covering a wide range of issues related to keeping the home free of allergenic triggers. For example, some aspects of indoor air quality depend upon whether residents operate ventilation systems correctly. Other issues are often easily overlooked, like keeping shrubs away from the side of the house to avoid waterlogged walls, or allergens being sucked into ventilation systems.

Before beginning a job, Pathway works with clients to ensure that all materials used for a project will contribute to their well-being, by helping environmentally sensitive individuals determine which materials cause allergic reactions. "Not all ingredients have to be listed on the MSDS (material safety data sheet)," Kennedy notes.

Occasionally, ingredients considered proprietary or inert, because their concentration is less than a certain percentage, act as triggers in sensitive individuals. Because even products widely considered eco-friendly may



Doug Kennedy, Operation Manager

have components that cause these individuals to react, Pathway customizes material choices for each client. "No two people are the same, so you can't look at a healthy home with a broad brush and apply the same practices to everyone," explains Kennedy.

Kocharhook and Kennedy are energized by their work to help homeowners enjoy more vitality and well-being. "It's something we get excited about, that makes us get up and want to go to work," Kocharhook says. "We love the idea of making people's lives better through healthier homes."

For more information, contact Pathway Design and Construction at 206-937-4809 or PathwayDC.com.



Paul Kocharhook, Owner

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