

Algonquin Students 'Double Smart' as they learn why as well as how

By CHRIS MUST
Staff Writer

EMC News - Algonquin College's Perth campus is training "not just the doer but the thinker," says Mark Bell. The lead instructor in the second year of the Advanced Housing Program at the college said his students have been learning about environmental responsibility as they build a duplex applying the principles of "green building."

"We are really not only giving them how we're doing it, but why we're doing it," said Bell. "This is critical for the next generation of builders."

The duplex project on Cockburn Street has been dubbed "Double Smart," in reference to the first construction project built by students at the town-owned Perth Works development four years ago. The first project was known as the "Smart Home" because it was designed to incorporate the principles of green building: energy efficiency, environmental responsibility and healthy housing. The new project, located next door, is "Double Smart" because it is a two-unit home, said Bell.

The Advanced Housing Program is one of two main programs at the college along with the Heritage Construction Program. The focus of the Advanced Housing Program is typically on new construction. The two projects built by the students at the Perth Works site have been organized in collaboration with Perth architect Geoff Hodgins.

The environmentally friendly focus of the projects, said Bell, reflects the fact that "we're thinking a bit more about our impact on the planet."

The program aims to give the students the skills and knowledge to build sustainable housing. The current project is relatively large, said Bell, being approximately 3,200 square feet. One of the finished units will be about 1,800 square feet, the other 1,400. Both units will be purchased by the owners, who are working with the architect and the college. "They are enjoying the fact that their project is part of training the next generation of home builders," said Bell.

The future owners have also accepted the protracted time line necessary because the students are able to work on the

construction only two days per week because about a third of the program is spent on site. The students are getting a combination of instructional time and actual work time.

There are 22 students in the course this year. They are spending about eight hours a week doing the construction. "They're learning on the job, in effect," said Bell. The valuable real-world experience they are gaining include the challenges of coping with inclement weather and shortages of materials.

"We have only had to miss one day of work," Bell said. "They've had to muscle through some pretty cold days."

Bell said the project will not be completed before the end of the current school year in April, but the clients' contract will take over and finish the homes.

He said the first project, the Smart Home, "truly exemplified form following function," while the new duplex will be more traditional in appearance.

"We're pretty close to where I'd like to be before we have a break," said Bell. "The students are doing an amazing job."



Mark Bell - Photo courtesy of EMC