

Little straw house - home sweet home

By BONNIE MULLEN

Building a home that is healthy, functional, esthetically pleasing and good for the environment can be a challenge. Glenn and Libby Little of Eden Mills have more than succeeded on all fronts in the construction of their straw-bale home.

The couple began by finding the building lot of their choice and researching various building methods. Their architect, Charles Simon, also of Eden Mills, suggested they consider the straw-bale option.

This method of construction dates back over 100 years to pioneers in Nebraska who used straw out of necessity. Further research, a visit to an existing home in the Hockley Valley, videos on the topic and volunteering on work crews for other homes under construction convinced the couple this would be the construction of choice for their new family home.

"I think the environment can use all the help it can get," Mrs. Little said. "We were interested in it being environmentally friendly and energy efficient. Using this waste product from agriculture we would be cutting fewer trees and getting super insulation."

Mr. Little attended a weekend workshop where they built a shed and thus decided to act as his own general contractor. They broke ground July 17, 2000. With the poured concrete foundation and post and beam structure in place, it was time to build the exterior walls with the bales of straw.

"We purchased 750 small, square two-string bales off the field at two dollars a bale," Mr. Little explained. In the end, only 500 were needed for the house.

An Internet posting on a related website, plus a poster in the village, saw 70 people, many formerly unknown to the Littles, show up the

first weekend for the bale raising.

One volunteer from Ottawa, came with his tools and stayed a few days. Camel Back Construction supervised the bale raising. Mrs. Little and her mother cooked and fed the volunteer crew.

The bales were stacked in place forming the exterior walls. With a chainsaw, channels were cut into the bales for armoured cable wiring to run the electricity. The bales were covered with wire mesh for the exterior stucco and interior plaster. One hundred bags of plaster were used.

The width of the bales also provides for wide windowsills and window benches in the home. The post and beam construction bares the load of the convention roof trusses. Interior walls were framed and dry-walled.

Positioning the house due south on the lot with south facing windows, as well as wide overhangs on the roof, has given this house additional passive solar benefits.

The installation of a masonry heater, an old eastern European technology, adds a fireplace and oven centrally between the living room, dining room and kitchen space. This low-emissions wood burning device requires filling only twice a day and keeps the main floor of the home comfortably warm all winter.

The addition of Brazilian cherry and slate floors coupled with natural wood trim has created a 2,300 square foot, two-storey home that is as beautiful as it is efficient. The Littles have achieved their construction goals and are delighted with their new home.

The straw house building method is continuing to gain favour in Ontario. As a result, the Littles' home is being featured in a soon-to-be-published coffee table book and also on an upcoming television program.

"The biggest benefit was meeting all the people who came and helped us. Strangers, who were like-minded people, volunteered.

Neighbours came, looked and came back to help us. It was a great way to meet the neighbours," Mrs. Little said.

Resources:
www.mwsolutions.com/stra,
<http://www.strawhomes.com>, the
laststraw@strawhomes.com. Books:
Straw Bale Building - How to Plan,

Design and Build with Straw by Canadians Chris Magwood and Peter Mack, published by New Society; *The Straw Bale Home* by Athena Swentzell Steen, published by Chelsea Green, Vermont
 If you know of an interesting home you would like to see featured, please contact Bonnie Mullen at 1-877-374-7653.



Home of Glen and Libby Little



Kathy Gastle Mayor

Town of Halton Hills
 1 Halton Hills Drive
 Halton Hills (Georgetown)
 Ontario, L7G 5G2
 Tel: 905.873.2601 ext. 2342
 Fax: 905.873.1431
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We're busy as elves! Mrs. Crawford is making batch upon batch of Light and Dark Fruit Cake, with lots of raisins, almonds, cherries, butter and rum, of course. Kelly is wrapping gorgeous Gift Baskets, full to overflowing with good things to eat from Crawford's. Betty is baking snappy Gingerbread, glorious buttery Shortbread, dainty Christmas Fancy Cookies and hearty, chocolate-packed Specials, all of which we'll arrange on Cookie Trays or in Cookie Boxes. Karen is simmering tangy cranberries, juicy oranges, crunchy pecans and lots of ruby port to make our famous Cranberry Orange Pecan Relish with Ruby Port. It's the best for turkey! We're making our own famous Chocolate Truffles, and creating magical toy trains, sleighs, Christmas trees and snowmen with Callebaut chocolate as well. Mr. Crawford will lend a hand mixing our wonderful Plum Pudding, and we've buttery Brandy Sauce to go with it too. There are beautiful Christmas Napkins and dripless Candles for your holiday table, and tasty Stocking Stuffer Ideas for Christmas morning. We're set to make your Christmas entertaining and gift giving a joy!

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