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Design expo has new energy-saving ideas

Everybody wants to know "what's new" when they go to an auto show, a garden show, or a pool and spa show. The Oct. 10-12 Fall Remodeling and Design Expo at the Rock Financial Showplace in Novi featured the Green Lifestyles Pavilion. The pavilion was a 20-foot-by-50-foot display area with companies exhibiting their green and energy-saving products and services.

These are some of the things that really caught my eye.

* **Outdoor and indoor LED lighting:** LED lighting products for outdoors and indoors are becoming more and more popular because they use less energy compared to incandescent lamps, and last longer, eliminating the need to change bulbs as frequently.

Ron Krueger from Garden Innovations, (248) 520-3104, was showing the Kichler LED accent lighting system for the first time. It not only can save you money on electricity and replacement bulbs, but they are brighter than your average garden accent lights. These lights come in 4.5, 8.5 and 12.4 watts, with beam spreads of 10 feet, 35 feet or 60 feet wide.

Krueger said these lights can be integrated into a current accent lighting system, and the bulbs last 40,000 hours. The compact size is easy to submerge in a home's landscaping area.

Speaking of lights, do you have cathedral ceilings or a two-story great room with recessed lights? If you're tired of using extension poles and ladders, or hiring someone to change bulbs when they burn out, I found something for you. LED lights are also big on the inside of the home these days, and Halo's LED recessed lighting units are becoming popular because of their 50,000-hour projected life versus a standard, recessed-lighting unit that lasts approximately 2,000 hours. According to Mike Bratcher of Bratcher Electric, (734) 722-0037, www.bratcherelectric.com, who was exhibiting the new Halo LED units, each unit can be retrofitted into any current recessed lighting system.

* **Geothermal heating and cooling systems:** Geothermal is the hot topic for heating systems as we enter the fall and winter months, and I got a chance to look at the WaterFurnace at the exhibit for Executive Heating and Cooling, (586) 416-4328, www.executiveheating.com. According to Charles Granzow, the WaterFurnace is a

geothermal heat pump system that can reduce your annual costs for heating, cooling and hot water by as much as 60 percent.

Geothermal heating and cooling systems use the relatively constant temperature of the earth to heat and cool homes by using a heat pump to simply move heat from the earth into your home, allowing much higher efficiencies. And thanks to the Energy Improvement and Extension Act of 2008, passed by Congress on Oct. 3 as part of the economic recovery package, homeowners can receive a one-time tax credit of 30 percent of the total cost for residential heat-pump installations, with a maximum credit of \$2,000.

The installed system must meet Energy Star requirements, and the legislation is retroactive to residential systems installed after Dec. 31, 2007.

*** Sealing your home:** With the news that the cost of heating your home will rise again this winter, now's the perfect time to seal your home so the heat won't escape and the cold air won't get in. I visited with Bob Carey, president of Draft Stop Energy and Insulation, (810) 329-9030, www.draftstop.net, to find out the best way to fix those drafts. Carey says his company evaluates the entire building to locate all the heat-loss problems from insulation and window performance, to air infiltration and moisture control. The company uses the infrared-imaging system to shoot video and still images that detail heat gain or loss, and blower-door testing to measure the air tightness of the entire building envelope.

From these tests, Draft Stop will develop a detailed plan to solve your problems. One of the solutions often recommended is to add the proper amount of insulation. For insulation, Draft Stop uses one of the best known green certified insulation products, Nu-Wool, (800) 748-0128, www.nuwool.com, which is made right here in Michigan. Nu-Wool uses recycled newspaper to manufacture its environmentally safe cellulose insulation.

Another company at the show, RetroFoam of Michigan, (866) 900-3626, [www.](http://www.retrofoamofmichigan.com)

[retrofoamofmichigan.com](http://www.retrofoamofmichigan.com), offers an alternative to cellulose insulation with its foamed-in-place insulation products. This foam-based product is nontoxic and produces no fumes or other emissions. It's also an Energy Star compliant product.

*** Turn that tub into a shower:** While the focus at the show was on living green and saving energy, there also were a lot of kitchen and bath displays. One that caught my eye was the tub-to-shower conversions available from Rebath of Michigan, (888) 732-2844, www.rebathit.com. According to Jeff Oslund of Rebath, his company can take out your old tub and install a new shower in one day. The cost ranges between \$4,000 and \$7,000, depending on the accessories you choose such as the style of shower doors or plumbing fixtures.

It seems like many older home were built with bathtub enclosures that are too small to be useful for adults, so converting it to a new shower may be just the solution. With the

current state of our Michigan economy, many people are choosing to stay put and do some desperately needed upgrades.

There's no better place to get some great ideas than at a builders' show. If you didn't get a chance to make it to this one, there will be more opportunities to attend them in winter and spring. So, start writing down your home improvement ideas now because planning prevents poor projects. You can also take advantage of the many free seminars available by checking the eEvents section of my Web site at [masterhandyman .com](http://masterhandyman.com).