

Oklahoma inspectors verify 'greenness' claims in construction CONSULTANT ENVIRONMENTAL SECTOR IS HEATING UP

BY RICHARD MIZE



"Green collar" jobs are hot and expected to stay hot even as the economy continues to cool.

That's Kelly Parker's take on it and he should know — he's hiring a couple more employees at Guaranteed Watt Saver.

Kelly Parker, president of Guaranteed Watt Saver, aims an infrared camera used to measure heat loss in houses when assessing their energy efficiency. Bringing existing homes up to "green" standards will be the next big thing in the environmentally friendly construction movement, he says. PHOTO BY DAVID MCDANIEL, THE OKLAHOMAN

GWS, 6444 Northwest Expressway, is an engineering and inspection company that provides third-party certification and verification for "green" construction, among other things.

Parker, not long out of Oklahoma State University with an industrial engineering degree, bought a company called Smart House Consultants in 1986. That led in 1994 to an association with GWS, which he now leads as president. But he started hands on — inspecting, testing and logging the way construction materials went into houses and businesses, how energy efficient they were and how cost effective they were, or were not.

What job requires

In today's lingo, Parker calls the job a third-party "green" construction inspector.

It requires a high school education and interest and knowledge of building materials and how they go together, particularly framing and heating, venting and air-conditioning systems, he said. Vocational-training is helpful, he said.

It does not, he said, require that many people skills — not at the entry level — since it doesn't involve working with people.

At the executive level, he said, the "green" inspection business needs people with science or engineering degrees with a head for business rather than business people with a science or engineering background.

Parker, 48, finds the work fun, meaningful and important.

"What makes it fun is you're helping people. It's helping the environment. It is helping to build environments which are not only energy efficient but durable also — it doesn't have mold problems with paint peeling off the next year."

Energy saving grows

In the 1980s, Parker had no way of knowing that a business out to help people conserve energy and save money would become so tied to the environmental movement — and become so popular. But that's what happened.

"Energy efficiency has morphed into 'green,'" he said.

The U.S. Green Building Council and its LEED certifications — for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design — set the standard.

The National Association of Home Builders and other organizations have "green" guidelines and professional designations. RESNET, the Residential Energy Services Network — a nonprofit organization that promotes house energy performance, which Parker led as president for two years — has standards, ratings and guidelines.

A third-party "green" construction inspector is on the front line of keeping claims to greenness honest, and Parker said industry executives will lead it into a future apparently untarnished by economic turmoil.

Business to increase

Parker said the builders GWS works with nationally have reduced the volume of houses they build during the construction slowdown, but that smaller builders are going green because it saves home buyers and owners money in the long run and is in demand — so his business is growing. His aim is to take the company public eventually.

"Some sectors of the economy are going to fall, going to go way down. Other sectors are going to increase and we believe the green movement is going to be one of those sectors," he said, noting that President-elect Barack Obama's transition team is working with green building leaders on programs and incentives to advance the movement.