

# Living the Green Dream

***Tracey Adams and Kent Raistrick made a dream come true in 2005, when they started a new farm on a large acreage in Eastern Ontario. Their main goals were to live a simple life, mindful of the environment, in the company of their beloved animals. They built a log home completely off the hydro grid, and set up rustic accommodations for their horses and poultry.***

By Tracey Adams

Kent and I met in 1995, and among the many things we had in common was a keen interest in reducing our impact on the environment. A year later, we bought a 100 year old farmhouse on thirteen acres, and with the limited resources of a young couple, we started on a path that became a passion. In the early years, we made modest adjustments. We gave up the clothes dryer in favour of the solar/wind powered dryer (the clothesline). We reduced, reused and recycled before it was fashionable. We shopped in, and donated to second hand stores, not just for economic reasons. We raised chickens for organic eggs, and kept a vegetable garden.

After eight years of frugal living, the mortgage was paid off, and that was when we began to plan our green dream home. Having dreamt of it for so many years, progress was quick. Over the winter, we researched various building styles and layout ideas. We searched tirelessly for the perfect piece of land, and read a lot about alternative energy. In June, 2005, we purchased 96 acres of farmland. What we got was a tiled and tilled working farm without any buildings. Fortunately, there are two twenty acre forests, and the land has a lovely gentle roll to it. We were also fortunate to have a good neighbour to farm the open land for us, thereby maintaining most of the good growing land. An added bonus is his willingness to incorporate organic growing practices.

The decision to go off-grid was easy enough, but we found it difficult to figure out where to start. Kent strongly recommends that anyone considering

greener power options should read the book, *The Renewable Energy Handbook For Homeowners* by William H. Kemp. It is an all around informative and interesting reference to all aspects of alternative energy, and was our bible during the research phase.

My advice is to visit someone who is already set up the way you would like to be. There was only one other family in Dundas County living completely off-grid, and we received a warm welcome and a tour of their home. From that tour, we learned much about what to look for when buying, how to find some retailers, and which questions to ask. Retailers are also an excellent source of information, and it goes without saying that there is endless information on the internet.

While Kent was narrowing the options for our power source, I was occupied with the final stages of home design. As a graphic designer, I was able to create accurate drawings of our ideal home using Adobe Illustrator. I then sent the files to an engineer who redrew the plans with builders' specifications. Having decided to go completely off-grid, there were many features that could be incorporated into the new home that would aid in the smooth operation of the system.

We were fortunate to find a local builder with an open mind. It was amazing to watch as our multi-talented trio of hard-working men completed about 90% of the construction in about four months.

It was also interesting working with our electrician. There were considerations, although not major, that he had to keep in mind. For instance, we had

to explain that we didn't want a doorbell because it constantly draws electricity. Every transformer possible had to be eliminated as well; and a creative alternative found. In the end, he admitted that he enjoyed the challenge, and looks forward to helping other families go off-grid.

For ease of heating, the house was built on a small footprint of only 900 square feet. With a keen dislike for the cold, dark damp basement, we built above grade on a slight slope. The slope was then augmented to create a basement with south-facing windows and patio doors opening onto the perennial garden. An ARXX engineered foundation also helped create a warm, dry living space.

The main living area is open and bright, with a passive solar layout to maximize the warmth and light available on bright days. An old fashioned Heartland cookstove provides extra heat and eliminates the need for burning propane while cooking during the winter. The house was situated on the east side of a line of trees to reduce the effect of the prevailing winter winds.

In September, 2006, we hosted a two-day open house, and had over 500 visitors. With this almost overwhelming show of interest, we came to a realization. On our own, we may not make much of a difference in this world, but by setting an example, we can inspire a new way of living. That is how we are really helping our planet. To that end, we offer tours to anyone interested in greener living. Visitors can learn not only about solar power, but also just how much can be done to reduce our carbon footprint.