

Peachtree Hills' plan to reduce energy use wins city notice

By Amanda Wolkin

When driving through the Peachtree Hills neighborhood, you cannot ignore George Hornbein's house. It sticks out like a sore, green thumb.

Among the modest, two-story brick homes, there sits a five-story house with windows covering an entire side, light-colored paint coating the home and solar panels sitting on the roof. The lawn is bare, save one sign advertising a local farmers market.

Not surprisingly, Hornbein, a Buckhead-based architect, is the founder of Greening Neighborhoods, an organization devoted to lowering energy consumption, and its pilot project Green Peachtree Hills.

"Our philosophy is that if we can make simple changes to make our lifestyles more sustainable, then we'll encourage our neighborhood to do the same," Hornbein said. "Eventually, our whole neighborhood will become greener. And then our hope is that it will stretch to other neighborhoods, then the whole city. Basically, we're trying to save the world here."

The Peachtree Hills Civic Association recently accepted the Phoenix Award, the city of Atlanta's highest award, on behalf of Greening Neighborhoods and Green Peachtree Hills.

Greening Neighborhoods began last February after Hornbein created a house on a mesa in New Mexico—a location which received no electricity and no water. It was Hornbein's job to design the house in such a

way that it could generate its own electricity and collect its own water.

After completing the project, it occurred to Hornbein: "Why can't I apply the same energy-saving principles to homes in Atlanta?"

Greening Neighborhoods was based on the idea that neighbors could show their neighbors what little changes they could make around the house to save energy and money.

Through weekly meetings, Green Peachtree Hills uses neighbor-to-neighbor education and even some competition—which home has the lowest level of energy consumption?—in an attempt to improve the impact the neighborhood has on the environment, and ultimately improve the members' economy and lives.

The organization has eight simple key ideas to save the world: take advantage of alternative transportation, reduce heating and cooling bills, establish efficient storm water management and municipal water management, reflect solar heat by using light colored roofing, reduce light pollution, separate and properly dispose of recyclables, eat locally grown produce and improve indoor air quality.

All members must track their energy and water bills and commit to improving their energy-consumption using the eight principles throughout their involvement with the club.

"By saving energy, we are saving money," said Hornbein. "One of my neighbors saved

70 dollars in a month by adding insulation to her attic to reduce the amount of heat that escaped in the winter."

Although Greening Neighborhoods' unique money-saving techniques has the city's support, Hornbein insists that energy conservation is a matter which the over 100 Greening Neighborhoods members must take into their own hands, rather than waiting for the government to take action.

"The government is playing politics with energy," said Hornbein. "When the Clean Air Act came out, all Republicans voted against it and all Democrats voted for it. Obviously, some Republicans agreed with it and some Democrats disagreed with it, but it all came down to politics. That's why people have to take charge of their own energy. We can't wait around for the government to work from the top down. We have to work from the bottom up. Greening Neighborhoods is a grass roots effort."

Currently, Greening Neighborhoods is working on receiving their nonprofit certification, getting their website up and expanding their membership base.

If you are interested in joining Greening Neighborhoods or establishing a green move-

ment in your neighborhood, contact Hornbein at George@studioala.net or go to <http://greeningneighborhoods.com> after July 8.



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George Hornbein, founder of Greening Neighborhoods, shows off two devices, one for the sink and one for the toilet, that are designed to decrease a household's water consumption.