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And the winner is ... all of us, and our planet

By Tom Watson

Special to The Seattle Times

When I was asked to be the judge for "Green Me Up," my first question was whether this was one of those mean and nasty reality TV shows.

But producer Liza Keckler, of Seattle's Screaming Flea Productions, assured me the focus was on two local families tackling a green transformation of their homes and their lives. So I jumped at the chance to be part of it.

The Petersons and the Willises were competing to see who could make their Queen Anne home the most eco-friendly. Because the show airs today — at 6 p.m. and again at 10 p.m. on the DIY Network (digital cable or via satellite) — I can't say who I picked as the winner.

But as it turned out, the two families accomplished more in their quest to "go green" than I ever would have dreamed. The Petersons and Willises seem like pretty average Seattle families. But what they did was exceptional.

Their projects and activities — more than 40 for each family — will help reduce global warming, conserve energy, save water, reduce toxics, prevent waste and improve their homes' indoor air quality.



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The new cork flooring in her parents' bedroom offers nice cushioning for Genna Peterson to practice her Irish dancing.



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Thanks to the new hot-water recirculating system, Stephanie and the rest of the

Most importantly, they demonstrate that we can all do these things.

They had a few advantages, of course. In addition to all the free green products the show provided, both families were ably assisted by two Seattle contractors who donated their time: Steve Fradkin, of Fradkin Fine Construction, for the Willises, and Robert Burns, of Envision Homes, for the Petersons. Each contractor put in about 40 hours.

Picking a winner proved more challenging than I expected. Each family did so much, and many of their activities and projects were not directly comparable. One thing making it easier for me was that both families felt they had already won, by getting all the free work and green products.

The best projects

In the end, some of the most mundane projects impressed me the most. For conserving energy, the Willises' attic insulation project was huge. And it should pay for itself in less than two years.

At the Petersons' house, they installed a spiffy new attic hatch that prevents a lot of heat from escaping. That will likely pay for itself in a couple years as well.

I also liked the new cork floor in the Petersons' master bedroom, which replaced a carpet. When you have less carpeting in your home, you often have better indoor air quality, since carpets collect dust. The cork flooring also looks great.

Near and dear to my heart was the Willises' emphasis on decluttering their home and reducing their consumption. If America ever intends to lead the world in reducing global warming, we'll need to start by buying less stuff.

The most encouraging thing was seeing both families' kids get so involved — even the teenagers, not always an easy crowd.

Will "green" reality TV shows like this one be just another short-lived trend? Perhaps. But don't expect the environmental ethic in America to fade away. In fact, I think it will only grow stronger. In 10

Willis family no longer waste water while waiting for it to get hot.



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Thanks to the new hot-water recirculating system, Stephanie and the rest of the Willis family no longer waste water while waiting for it to get hot.

years, I hope that what the Willises and Petersons did will no longer seem unusual. It will just be the way we live.

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