



# The Bridges

STORY AND PHOTOS BY BARBARA RIXSTINE

The Bridges is Lincoln's first geothermal neighborhood and the first of its kind in the state.

Contrary to what Kermit the Frog said, it's quite easy bein' green. Just ask the principals of The Bridges: Gary Pickering of Pickering Creative and Mike Rezac, owner of Rezac Construction.

The Bridges, a 70-lot "green" housing development located near Southwest 27th, off Denton Road, is Lincoln's first geothermal neighborhood and the first of its kind in the state. Not quite sure what geothermal means? Well, it sort of means like it sounds. "Geo" refers to earth and "thermal" refers to the heat that it can yield.

Think of the earth, maybe, as a kind of geothermal heat pump. In winter, the earth's heat warms under-

ground or underwater pipes which carry that heat into the home. In summer, it's the other way around; the system pulls heat from the home and transfers it to the ground loop piping installed underground. The water solution in the ground loop then carries water back to the earth. The only external energy needed is just enough electricity to operate the ground loop and fan.

What makes a geothermal home a good deal? Lower energy costs of around \$500 to \$1,500. Yes, these costs are offset in the beginning by a higher-priced system, but it only takes a few years until homeowners begin to see real savings in their utility bills. And you're helping to cut down on fossil fuel use.

"A geothermal system does not burn fossil fuels to generate heat," builder Mike Rezac said. "It just transfers it from the earth to your home and back again."

Pickering says there are several advantages to using geothermal heating and cooling including improved comfort, because the system heats uniformly; lack of noise, because not only is the system quiet, there's no outdoor unit noise; and the system requires less maintenance and yet lasts longer than traditional systems.

"No home is maintenance-free, but these systems typically last more than 20 years if you properly maintain them," Pickering said.

For example, Pickering estimates that, for a medium-size home with a 4-ton system, the geothermal heating system will cost \$525 per year; a standard heat pump

will cost \$985 per year and an electric furnace with air conditioning will cost \$1,350 per year.

"Geothermal (building) is fairly new to most consumers," Pickering added, "but geothermal energy is recognized by the EPA as the most environmentally safe, cost-effective heating and cooling system on the market. Installing a geothermal system is equivalent to planting 750 trees or taking two cars off the road."

All of this is same-old, same-old for Rezac, who's been building "green" homes for about 15 years and believes "going green" is the responsible thing to do as a builder. "Not every customer decides to build that way," Rezac said. "But we felt, as a builder, it was important for us to offer that to our customers and make sure they understood the benefits of doing that and let them make the decision."

"Obviously, with what people are experiencing today, energy-efficiency is the right approach," Rezac said. As the president of the Nebraska Green Building Council, and a builder who works with the Nebraska Energy Office, he's interested in water conservation, using less water and fewer chemicals.

In addition, The Bridges uses an environmentally sound waste management system with a state-of-the-art, sand-filtered underground treatment system, with no discharge into creeks or ponds.

There's more than geothermal heating and cooling going on at The Bridges, of course. The development includes 25 acres of commons maintained by the association and features covered bridges, a waterfall, paved roads and trails and four acres of ponds. Seven-foot-wide trails wind approximately two miles around the ponds and over the bridges.



Top left: A waterfall is located at one edge of the property. Top right: Several bridges around the property give The Bridges its name. Above: Mike Rezac (left) and Gary Pickering (right) relax in the midst of preparing The Bridges' model home for the Parade of Homes.