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Virginia homebuilder pursues a center for 'zero-energy' makeovers

By **Jim Pierobon** | September 1, 2016

Photos by Jim Pierobon

Charley Juris, recently retired as a custom home builder, thought his career was behind him when took a phone call from a neighbor who thought her furnace was on fire. Fortunately, it wasn't – but he enjoyed helping her find the most energy- and cost-efficient solution to replace it.

That experience launched him toward what is now a one-stop shop in Alexandria, Virginia designed to help owners of existing homes who want to cut their energy bills way back – to near-zero where possible – without sacrificing comfort.

Juris' success in a state with relatively low electricity rates and virtually no government or utility incentives for conserving energy or renewable energy systems signals how a market for integrated and holistic energy solutions may be underserved in Virginia and perhaps elsewhere. Juris calls his answer to this market need the [Energy House Solutions Center](#).

After fielding, and turning down, requests from potential clients for one-off installations of more efficient energy systems, “that’s where my idea of a solutions center hit me,” said Juris, who recently turned 62. Rather than take on one-off jobs, he embarked on recasting customers’ entire energy systems and supporting materials such as the latest insulation.



Carley Juris

“The only way to make it work is to be part of the overall design and construction process. We help people design energy efficiency into the remodels and work with contractors we’ve vetted who have proven to us they’ll do it right and for a fair price.”

When Juris and his participating suppliers and contractors formally unveil the Solutions Center in Alexandria, Virginia, on Saturday, September 10, the one-time high school lacrosse coach will have survived a thorough scrutiny of his business model at the [1776.vc incubator for energy, education, health and transportation startups](#) in Crystal City, Virginia and Washington, D.C.

Even with the inputs from startup professionals, Juris acknowledged building this business requires the personal energy he wasn’t quite sure he had. Perhaps that’s why his business model, he claims, is unmatched in Northern

Virginia and everywhere he’s looked the U.S. That includes high-cost energy markets in California, where he researched the concept, and New England, where he lived and worked for 23 years.

Since 2010, Juris and his network of sub-contractors have completely redesigned energy systems for 13 residences in Northern Virginia, all of them integrated with renewable energy heating and cooling systems and/or insulation and other materials uniquely suited for them. He expects to complete the 14th “Energy House” as a zero-energy home this Fall.

“There are companies that do pieces of what Charley is doing, but not the whole package,” said Mike Maher, a business development manager at Rehau Construction LLC, an international supplier of geothermal energy systems based in Leesburg, Virginia.

Al Cox, a LEED-accredited architect who is a past client of Juris’ and who manages historic preservation projects in Alexandria, said Juris is the only professional he knows who addresses all the variables in re-engineering homes for improved energy efficiency and sustainability. “He looks at everything, soup-to-nuts. He’s full of ideas that make sense for individual homes that might not make sense anywhere else,” Cox said.

At the Solutions Center, Cox said, “you can see and touch the equipment and materials he talks about; you don’t have to rely on a brochure or a supplier’s web site. He then rolls the costs into a spreadsheet so you can see and track the projected return on each investment.”

Cox cited a good example: he and his wife knew they needed more and better insulation in the attic of their Alexandria home. Rather than just recommend off-the-shelf R38-rated insulation, Juris assessed the dew point in the walls and how to guard against moisture that could find its way there from upstairs bathrooms.

While there are a couple of good architects in Virginia who specialize in new, passive-house designs, as well as, high-end builders of Energy Star-rated homes, Cox said Juris' work is especially valuable in Alexandria, where many of the residences and other structures pre-date the Revolutionary War.

Cox said Juris served on a city working group whose mandate was to make Alexandria as energy efficient and sustainable as possible while maintaining its rich history.

Juris is quick to admit he thought six years ago he was too old to try something like this. "But it's been a lot of fun. I'm really enjoying it." He's quick to add though: "My family made me promise I would not go off on another tangent like this ever again."

See it online at: <http://southeastenergynews.com/2016/09/01/virginia-homebuilder-pursues-a-center-for-zero-energy-makeovers/>

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Veteran journalist and communicator. Jim writes the monthly "Game Changers" column on The Energy Collective and blogs at TheEnergyFix.com. He resides in Leesburg, Virginia.

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