

# RE People

**Who:** Kevin & Katie Reily

**Where:** Chapel Hill, North Carolina

**When:** 2006 to present

**What:** Solar-electric & solar hot water systems

**Why:** Sound financial & environmental investment

Kevin and Katie Reily have focused their energy and efforts on setting an example of how American families can have lifestyles that are both sustainable and comfortable. Kevin is dedicated to right livelihood and pioneered a first-of-its-kind vinyl siding reclamation and recycling operation. Katie is a speech-language therapist in private practice, a people person with a strong environmental bent, and she loves to travel.

"A year after I graduated from high school, I started a little farm in eastern Tennessee and remodeled the old farmhouse, where I cooked and heated with wood," says Kevin. "Katie and I designed a passive solar house, but never got around to building it before we moved to Atlanta, where our four children were born. My interest in renewable energy went underground until we bought rural property in North Carolina."

In 1993, Kevin and Katie bought 7 1/2 acres outside Chapel Hill, remodeled an old garage on the property as a temporary dwelling, and lived in it until Hurricane Fran hit in 1996. The storm turned out to be a literal windfall for them, and they used fallen oak trees to build a post-and-beam home attached to the garage. Many other materials in the house are also



reclaimed or recycled, from windows to the kitchen sink to a floor made from old chimney bricks. To further minimize resource use, the house was designed with deep overhangs to shade windows in the summer. Even during North Carolina's hot and humid summers, it needs no air conditioning.

The Reilys' renewable energy systems include a wood heater and a solar thermal system for space heating and domestic hot water, and a grid-tied 2.4-kilowatt solar-electric system with battery backup. The battery bank was sized to support water pumping, refrigeration, office appliances, and pumps for the radiant heating system during the occasional utility outages that they experience. Two low-tech solar energy dryers—sturdy clotheslines—round out the Reilys' RE system.

Renewable energy interests the Reily family for several reasons: "We feel good investing in an industry that has potential to reduce global warming. Strong tax incentives have made it economically attractive for us to invest in RE now. And having a backup system when the utility goes down is a very useful bonus."

Ed Witkin of Carrboro Solar Works installed the Reilys' solar-electric system and has known the family for years. Their kids went to school together, and Ed has grown to respect the family environment that Kevin and Katie have built—and the environmental consciousness they have. "The Reilys' home is alive with the work they're all doing to nurture themselves and the Earth."

—Ian Woofenden

