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Bed and breakfast promotes eco-friendly experience

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AMHERST -- Almost everything about the Artha Sustainable Living Center, LLC, a bed and breakfast in Amherst, is eco-friendly.

It's got solar thermal panels and air collectors, wood stoves, organic linen and soaps, organic food from its garden, wood from sustainable forests and an electric lawn mower.

Even one look at the bedroom doors and the "green" concept is clear: Energy, Solar and Garden rooms.

"We're rabid environmentalists," one of the owners and energy consultant Bob Ramlow said. "It sort of goes hand in hand with 'You practice what you preach.' "

The center is a Travel Green Wisconsin destination, which means it employs smart business practices, reduces costs and protects the state's landscape.

Sitting on 90 acres of land, the center strives to teach people to exist in harmony with the environment and be in tune with their inner selves.

The house was converted to a bed and breakfast in 2007. When Ramlow and his family moved to a new one nearby, the family lived there and made their own electricity for almost 30 years.

"On the energy side, it doesn't cost us any more to have it. Sure, it's an investment up front, but the savings pay for the investment," Ramlow said, adding that for one year his heating and utility bills are about \$150.

Co-owner Marguerite Ramlow said business is going well. People visit because they're attending workshops either with the center or, perhaps, with the Midwest Renewable Energy Association.

There's also an option to create a retreat or workshop by structuring classes based on interests. She said they offer classes on things such as solar water heater installation, gardening, yoga and making cosmetics, bath and beauty products.

"It really covers the whole gamut of people," she said.

Debora Hutchinson of Green Bay and her family stayed in the center in February.

"We thought it'd be a good education and fun," Hutchinson said. "It was really very very nice. It was larger than we thought, very roomy and warm."

She said it was a cold winter night and two wood stoves kept it cozy.

The family tries to do the little things to be more eco-friendly, but she said they learned there's more

they can do.

"It was nice to see how something could work so well and be so comfortable," she said. "It made us think about challenging ourselves a little bit more."
