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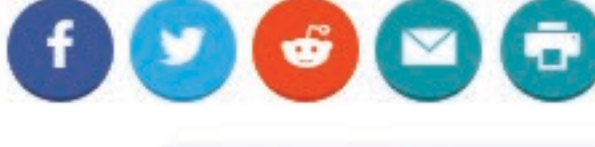
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ORANGE COUNTY NEWS

# Experimental, futuristic home in Santa Ana awarded to veteran family, others to follow



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Solar panels on the roof of the home generate 5.5 kw of electricity, enough to offset the use of grid power and make for very low utility bills. (Photo by Sam Gangwer, Orange County Register/SCNG)

By **JEFF COLLINS** | [JeffCollins@scng.com](mailto:JeffCollins@scng.com) | Orange County Register

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Design an experimental house of the future that meets 2020 zero-net-energy building standards? Check.

Build it at the Orange County Great Park with high school students taking part in the construction? Check.

Put it on display for a year, disassemble it, move it to a permanent new location and put it back together again? Check, check and check.

Over the past six years, the ABC Green Home project has met almost all of its goals for building a home that's "affordable," "buildable" with existing technology and "certified" as an energy- and water-efficient.

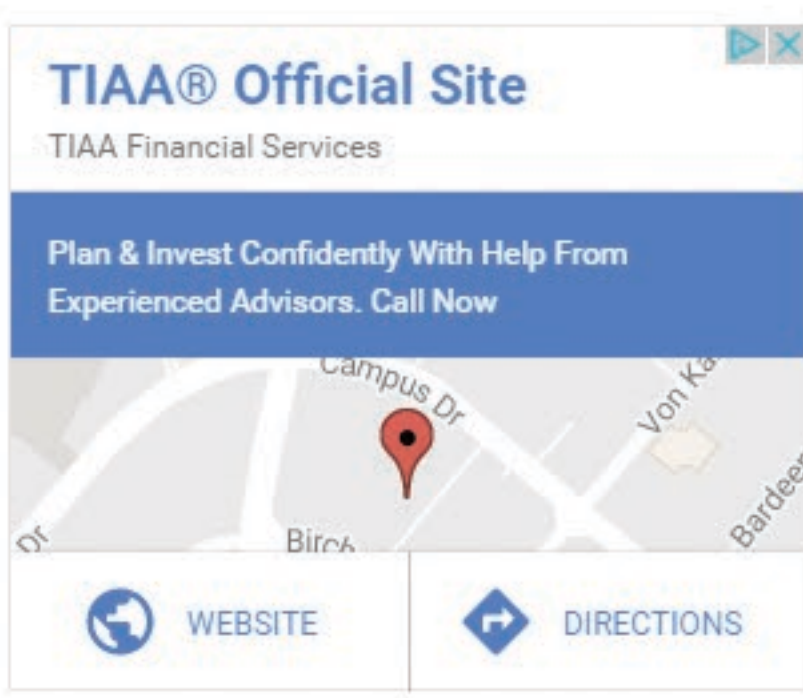
But one last item had yet to be checked off the list: Turn the keys over to a low-income veteran.

Until now.

On Monday, Southern California Edison turned over an oversized skeleton key to Habitat for Humanity, which has selected the project's first residents.

About a week from now, a former National Guard sergeant who served in Afghanistan will close escrow on the first of seven ABC Green Homes in the works.

The veteran and his family — his wife, their 15-year-old son, and daughters age 4 and 9 — are buying the 1,700-square-foot, one-story house from Habitat.



The family buying the Santa Ana home will pay about \$295,000, based on their ability to pay, not the home's appraised value. Their house payment will be just over \$1,200 a month.

A second, nearly identical home recently was completed on that same lot, across from Washington Elementary School in south Santa Ana. Habitat will hold a dedication ceremony for the second home Saturday, although a family has not yet been picked to live there.

Meanwhile, in Fullerton, developers prepared for Thursday's grand opening of the next in a series of ABC Green Homes, which could be transferred to yet another veteran family as soon as mid-May.

Two other homes are planned for Fullerton, a sixth home is nearing completion in the San Gabriel Valley, and the seventh is in the planning stages in the San Bernardino County mountain village of Crestline.

The homes are part of an ongoing project to develop zero-net-energy homes, which produce as much energy as they consume.

To do that, you make it as fuel-efficient as possible, then you add some power generation to it like roof-top solar panels, said Marc Ulrich, vice president of customer programs for Southern California Edison, sponsor of the first ABC Green Home originally built at the Great Park.

"Over the course of a year, this home and its inhabitants should essentially generate as much electricity as they use," Ulrich said. "These are a lot of accomplishments in one home."

To meet those goals, the home has 24 solar panels on the roof, extra-thick walls filled with foam insulation, LED lighting, ceiling fans, energy-saving appliances and innovative technology like a heat pump that uses excess energy from the water heater.

To make sure the home's design and systems work as planned, Edison will monitor energy consumption for two years.

With Edison's backing, developers redesigned and rebuilt the first ABC Green Home in Santa Ana using items that could be salvaged and moved: light fixtures, cabinets and solar equipment.

Because the lot is big enough for two homes, Habitat built a second one next door with a near-identical design, using windows salvaged from the original Great Park home. The key difference is the Habitat-built home uses both gas and electricity, while the Edison home is, as one would expect, all electric.

The veteran family selected to buy the first home helped build the second home as part of their requirement to invest 500 hours of "sweat equity."

"It's a commitment, but the family is assuming a 0-percent mortgage, based on their income, not on the appraised value of the home," said Sharon Ellis, president and chief executive of Habitat's Orange County chapter.

The family will own the home, but should they choose to sell, Habitat gets the right to buy it back based on how much the family invested in the home over time.

Habitat, meanwhile, has interviewed 63 families for the first Fullerton home, which was built on a city-donated lot near Harbor Boulevard and Commonwealth Avenue.

The finalist is a retired, disabled Marine who would be sharing the four-bedroom home with his wife, their two children and his mother-in-law, who would live in a small "multi-generation" suite on the first floor.

Nick Slevin, publisher of Green Homebuilder magazine, chief developer of the ABC Green Homes, estimated the Santa Ana home cost about \$210,000 in "sticks and bricks," which doesn't include the value of the land or design and development costs. The Fullerton home, the second to be completed so far, cost about \$250,000 to \$300,000 to build, or about \$100 to \$125 per square foot, he said.

"These are custom homes," Slevin said. "Obviously, if you're building 50 homes, your costs drop like a rock."

In creating the three Eichler-inspired ABC Green Homes in Fullerton, developers changed the design slightly.

Both the Santa Ana and Fullerton homes reduce lumber consumption by using bigger studs spaced farther apart than in traditional homes. They create 9-inch-thick outer walls filled with insulation to reduce the amount of heating and cooling needed. Both have water-conserving landscaping and low-flow plumbing fixtures.

The Santa Ana house used the newest spray foam technology to insulate the walls. The Fullerton home used the same traditional blown-in insulation that's cheaper and been in use for decades.

Project designers also have learned the original home design is impractical for the building industry because it's too small for today's market. Newer project designs call for bigger, multi-story homes to take greater advantage of high land prices.

"We're building them to demonstrate best practices in the building industry," Slevin said. Referring to the Fullerton home, he added, "This house is bigger, yet it uses less power. So the team is learning."

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**Jeff Collins**  
For more than a decade, Jeff Collins has followed housing and real estate, covering market booms and busts and all aspects of the real estate industry. He has been tracking rents and home prices, and has explored solutions to critical problems such as Southern California's housing shortage and affordability crisis. Before joining the Orange County Register in 1990, he covered a wide range of topics for daily newspapers in Kansas, El Paso and Dallas. A Southern California native, he studied at UC Santa Barbara and UC Irvine. He later earned a master's degree from the USC School of Journalism.

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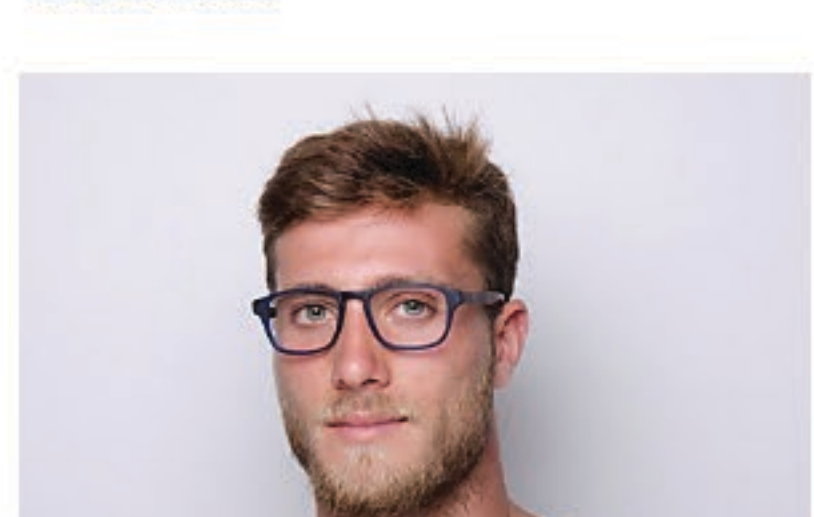
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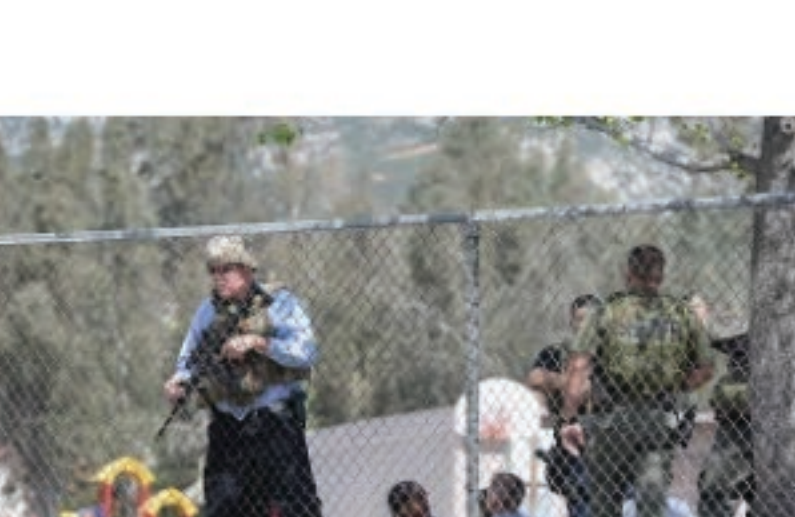
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