

# USDA Partners to Construct Straw Homes that are Built to Last

 [usda.gov/media/blog/2011/01/26/usda-partners-construct-straw-homes-are-built-last](http://usda.gov/media/blog/2011/01/26/usda-partners-construct-straw-homes-are-built-last)

Posted by Donna Birk, USDA Rural Development Utah Public Information Officer in Rural  
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The finished home with a photo of the trailer it replaced (foreground)

The organization “Community Rebuilds” along with USDA Rural Development recently welcomed Sascha Pastler and Colleen Jarrett into their newly completed straw bale home. A ribbon cutting ceremony was held at their front door. The large crowd attending was soon invited inside to see the first USDA funded straw bale home in Utah.

Have you ever wondered what is under the plaster finish? That’s not the case in a straw bale home where it is tradition to include a “truth window,” an interior small framed glass window where you can see the truth of what the wall is made of. The 920 square foot energy efficient design uses passive solar energy to heat the three bedroom, one bathroom home. This straw bale construction replaced a 1976 mobile home while reusing the kitchen cabinets, kitchen sink, and a variety of other material from the old trailer. The new home was financed through USDA Rural Development’s Home Loan Program and completed by Community Rebuilds with the help of recruited college students. Community Rebuilds is an example of the Obama Administration’s dedication to supporting grassroots solutions for economic development, green job creation, and business models supporting environmental sustainability. Without this leadership and the financing through USDA Rural Development, this project would not have been possible.

Community Rebuilds' mission is to build energy efficient housing, provide education on sustainability, and improve the housing conditions of the workforce through an affordable program. Student volunteers must commit to a 4-month internship in Moab, in most cases receiving college credit for their participation. Students come from all over the country; they are in their 20's and not required to be associated with a college or university. The student interns receive a free place to live, a monthly food stipend, and a hands-on natural building education in return for their dedicated volunteerism helping to build the straw bale home.

"It is a dream come true for my family to be selected for the first straw bale home. It has been so much fun watching the building process. I was able to be there once a week, usually holding ladders or being a tool gopher, but I loved to help. It's so exciting that so many people have signed up to help. Word is getting around town and so many people ask me for updates when they see me at work. This is a wonderful program. With most of the houses in the Moab area being trailers, so many families could benefit and live in healthier dwellings with lower utility bills," said the new homeowner, Colleen Jarrett.

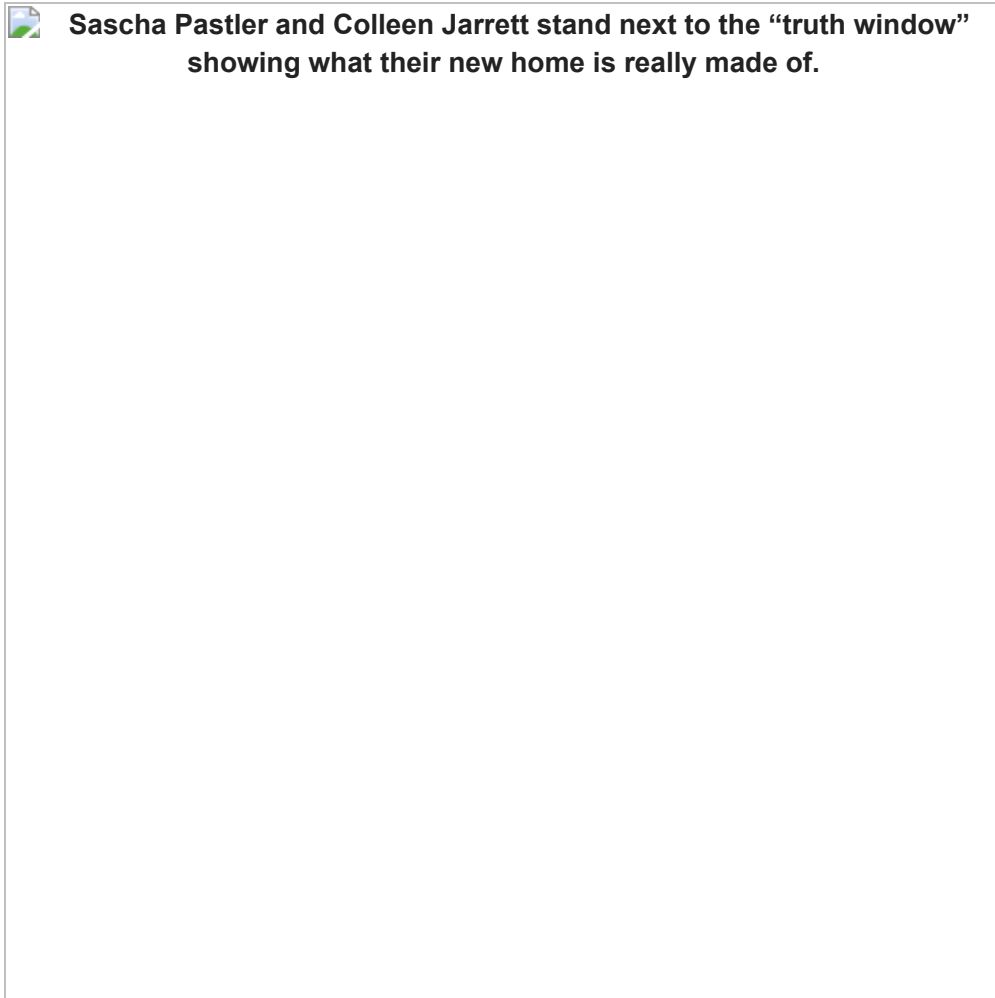
Dave Conine, USDA Rural Development state director told me, "Emily Niehaus originally established Community Rebuilds as a means for low income people in Moab to replace deteriorating mobile homes that could not be upgraded or improved through conventional financing. The Community Rebuilds vision for replacing old mobile homes with energy efficient homes constructed with locally available natural materials has provided a great demonstration of the benefits of combining educational internships with projects that address community needs. When Community rebuilds approached Rural Development staff about financing the construction of a straw bale, earthen plaster home there was some skepticism among RD staff who were unfamiliar with the construction materials and techniques. I applaud the vision and hard work done by Emily and the crew at Community Rebuilds. I am also proud of the way the USDA Housing Program staff stepped up to participate in this outstanding project."

**Learn more about [Community Rebuilds](#)** .

**For information on this program and other programs offered by USDA Rural Development in rural Utah, and across America call 801-524-4324. You can also stop by one of Utah's eight state/local offices, or visit our website [www.rurdev.usda.gov/ut](http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/ut).**



Construction of the straw bale home in Moab, Utah.



Sascha Pastler and Colleen Jarrett stand next to the "truth window" showing what their new home is really made of.

Category/Topic: Rural

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