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84-year-old veteran is building his answer to the housing crisis – by hand

His affordable, eco-friendly prototype promises to house a family for \$50,000 or less

Animas, New Mexico (Dec 8, 2023) — At the age of 84, Rod Rylander sold his home and is using the proceeds to build a game-changing prototype of affordable, eco-friendly housing – by hand. That’s right – the elder dug the foundation and built the initial rock walls with a pickaxe and a shovel (which he has since supplemented with a tractor). His goal: to showcase how anyone can build their own home for \$50,000 or less – and do it off-grid, if they choose, with solar and wind power, well-water and rainwater, and gardens for food.

Disturbed by the devastating accounts of the housing crisis, climate change, and food insecurity, Rylander knew there was a way to mitigate all three at once. He wondered why more people weren’t availing themselves of it.

“They didn’t get the memo, because of greed,” he said. “Everyone wants their cut, no matter how many people are left homeless or trapped in unaffordable leases, and they’re not going to tell you how to avoid paying them. What better way to show them than to ‘just do it,’ myself? Hopefully, people will think, ‘if an 84-year-old can do it, why can’t I?’”

Rod has been building affordable, eco-friendly homes since studying social ecology at Goddard College and practicing vernacular construction in the Peace Corps soon after. He owned and operated a sustainable building and construction company in his home state of Texas, then joined an ecovillage with others experimenting with natural and green building, and conducted educational workshops on sustainable building and design, both on site and off.

Now, as he approaches his 85th birthday, he feels an urgency to make sure his decades of experience aren’t lost, especially after reading in this year’s *State of the Nation’s Housing 2023* report from Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies. The report chronicles record unaffordability, near-record housing shortages, and major barriers to first-time homeownership. Over 2.4 million potential homebuyers were priced out of homeownership in the last year.

“I’m an innovator at heart and by training, and I feel like I have a responsibility to help create and model peaceful, equitable, and sustainable human lifestyles.,” says Rylander, who is Vice President of the International Center For Sustainability Inc.

“This prototype is an experiment, and I am testing what cannot be done, what can be done more efficiently, and how it can be both affordable and compatible with what people in contemporary society want,” he explained.

A [GoFundMe](#) was set up this month by supporters of his project to help complete the prototype and develop plans and a scalable model that can be replicated by anyone, on one acre, for \$50,000. The model will include designs, plans, and details for setting up a solar array and wind power, drilling a well, and installing rainwater collection.

ABOUT ROD RYLANDER: Rod has spent most of his 84-years on the planet, gathering, applying, and teaching skills in community formation, natural and vernacular building, permaculture, and related areas. Now he wants to fulfill his mission to create and share a model to create homes for under \$50,000. Rod's approach uses the most natural, simple, affordable, and accessible materials and methods to quickly cut through the barriers and get people housed, fed, and connected in a supportive community of peers. In all of his projects, he partners with learners willing to trade labor for skills, to collaborate in making a difference in the world. *For more information, visit www.rodrylander.com*

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