

## KATONAH ARCHITECT HELPS HOMEOWNERS GO GREEN

DeCandia said there's an obligation to make houses more energy efficient.

By [Michael Woyton](#) | July 26, 2010



Michael DeCandia, of Katonah-based ECO Design Group LLC, at work on an architectural sketch. His firm specializes in creating greener and healthier living spaces.

Sara Weale had never owned a house before. She and her husband bought a 1930s four-bedroom house in Katonah that is being renovated, and they are hoping to be moving into it soon.

"My husband and I believe it's a civic responsibility to be good stewards of the environment," Weale said. "We are making the house so we are not consuming a lot of resources."

She did her research on turning a home into one that is energy efficient, but Weale turned to Katonah builder and architect Michael DeCandia of ECO Design Group LLC for his advice.

"I learned a lot," Weale said, "but I never would have been able to do it on my own."

DeCandia began as an architect in New York City in 1975. He started his own firm in 1993, and eventually found himself working more in Westchester. Recently, he has been focusing more on building and design of work that is more sustainable.

"We feel almost an obligation to do work that is more energy conscious, where thought is given to the environment of the home and the indoor air quality," DeCandia said.

His firm earlier this year received "gold star" accreditation from the Building Performance Institute (BPI), allowing him to partner with the New York State Energy and Research Development Authority's Energy Star Program. That enables his clients to receive grants and rebates for energy-efficient materials and equipment. DeCandia is also certified in the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System, which is used to independently verify a building project is environmentally sound. ECO Design provides one-stop shopping for homeowners' energy needs, he said, from design to construction, along with seeing what improvements existing homes might need. The process can start with an energy audit that yields a list of suggestions the owner can implement.

"Sealing the home — insulating it properly — is usually top on the list," DeCandia said.

Bedford has initiated a building efficiency program that lets homeowners borrow money for energy retrofits and pay it back through a property tax charge.

Mark Thielking, Bedford's director of energy resources, said the notion that saving energy can be costly is unfounded.

He said plugging electronics into a power strip and turning off the electricity when not in use could save 5 percent of one's electricity bill.

"In Bedford's homes, that could amount to about \$120 a year when the power strip is a \$10 investment," Thielking said.

He said the average Energy Star retrofit in Westchester County costs about \$12,500 to produce a 30 percent savings.

"In a little over five years, the homeowner could recover their investment in energy efficiency while reaping the benefits of a more comfortable home, lower pollution emissions and, after the fifth year, an extra \$2,400 in savings annually."

Mary Beth Kass is chairwoman of the Bedford Energy Advisory Panel and copresident of the [Bedford 2020 Coalition](#), a nonprofit corporation whose goal is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent by 2020. She said it is not just the mission of the coalition to work with local businesses to assist them in reducing emissions.

"Companies who want to prepare themselves to thrive in the future should be sensitive to the growing consumer demand for environmentally responsible products and services," she said. "Vendors like ECO Design will be held up as examples of businesses who are already aligned with Bedford's 20 percent by 2020 goals. DeCandia said he is seeing more people interested in finding ways to not only cut energy expense, but help the environment.

"Generally, the incentive is to save you money," he said, "but it is important to create a comfortable and safe environment in terms of air quality in your own home."

The contractor for Weale's home is South Salem-based Cusato Management Corp. Between the DeCandia and Cusato, she feels the project has proceeded with the most environmentally sound materials.

"There are so many meanings of the word 'green,' " Weale said, "and it's difficult to hit all the points, but we've done our best."