



Todd Booze, owner of IDEAL HOMES

# Ideal Homes

## Pioneering Builder Makes Geothermal a Standard Feature

When it comes to hearing “it just can’t be done,” Oklahoma City-based Ideal Homes couldn’t be more welcoming of the challenge.

Specializing in energy-efficient homes priced under \$200,000, Ideal Homes has been racking up a long list of industry firsts for nearly two decades. Among other notable achievements, this list includes being the first builder recognized by the EPA as a “5-Star” Energy Builder for Homes Under \$150,000 (in 1997), and being the first in the U.S. to build a “Zero Energy Home” priced under \$200,000.

Today, Ideal Homes is making residential building history again by delivering geothermal heated and cooled homes at first-time buyer prices, exploding the fast-held belief that only the wealthy can afford high-efficiency technology in their homes. Not only is geothermal provided as an option for every Ideal Homes residential product, it is a standard feature in two Ideal Home

neighborhoods, Somer’s Pointe and The Springs at Settlers Ridge, both located in the Oklahoma City metro area.

With more than 7,000 houses under its belt, Ideal Homes has learned a thing or two about building houses with a lower operating cost. Perhaps more importantly, the company has also learned how to sell lower operating cost as a value-added feature in their homes. While some builders insist homeowners are only “buying the box” and can’t sit still for conversations about energy efficiency, Ideal Homes is once again proving the “impossible” can be done by having those conversations directly translate to purchases. In fact, the company closed on approximately 350 geothermal homes in 2013 and expects to close on even more in 2014.

“Energy efficiency has kind of been our forte,” said Steve Shoemaker, director of marketing for Ideal Homes. “It’s pretty easy to sell high efficiency features in high-end homes. What separates Ideal Homes is the energy efficiency we bring to first-time buyers.”



# IDEAL HOMES

## Taking Geothermal Ground Loop Costs out of the Equation

According to Shoemaker, Ideal Homes determined a long time ago that energy savings really resonates with homebuyers.

“No matter what your leanings are environmentally, everybody loves saving money,” Shoemaker said. “When someone walks through our doors, one of the first things we try to talk about is cost of ownership. We remind them that in addition to a mortgage payment, they also have to pay to operate that home. So when someone tells us that they can buy a home of the same square footage that is \$10,000 less, we’re able to show them that if they look at the total cost of ownership, our homes are actually a better value.”

Such conversations work well when discussing better windows and insulation, but higher ticket upgrades like geothermal have remained a tough sell because of the upfront expense of the loop field. However, thanks to a unique partnership between Ideal Homes and Caddo Electric Cooperative, the local utility company, homebuyers in two neighborhoods near Oklahoma City are getting all the benefits of geothermal without having to bear the upfront cost of the loop fields.

Caddo has developed a program allowing homeowners to forego costs associated with ground loop installation and maintenance in exchange for payment of a monthly thermal energy fee. Caddo assumes responsibility for

installing and maintaining the geothermal ground loop system through this program, and charges a permanently fixed monthly fee (\$15 to \$24 per month on average) to the homeowner for its use. The fee is offset several times over by virtue of the energy savings, as well as by Caddo’s lowest electrical rate, which the utility grants to residences with geothermal systems. The program, which kicked off in the summer of 2012, is available to all homeowners in the Caddo Electric coverage area.

ClimateMaster and the company’s builder development manager, Titian Burris, worked for several years with both Caddo Electric and Ideal Homes to help facilitate the program.

“This was a great opportunity for two entities highly committed to growing the residential geothermal market to overcome any upfront challenges by combining efforts and really make it happen,” said Burris.

Now, instead of having to “sell” geothermal, geothermal helps sell Ideal Homes properties, especially in Somer’s Pointe and The Springs at Settlers Ridge, where geothermal is a standard feature.

## A Program That Sells Itself

Todd Taylor and his wife, Darise, purchased their home at The Springs at Settlers Ridge in January 2013. Finding a builder that could provide an energy-efficient home was a high priority for the couple and they liked the neighborhood and low-maintenance patio home options at Settlers Ridge. It was serendipitous that the Caddo Electric program just happened to coincide with their decision to buy a new home. When Ideal Homes told them that they could have geothermal heating and cooling as a standard option on their home, Taylor checked out the technology. The deeper he looked, the more convinced he became that choosing a home with geothermal was indeed a smart decision, particularly given the Caddo Electric program.

“I discussed it with several friends that I have in the heating and air business,” said Taylor. “They all said the same thing – I’d be an idiot not to take advantage of the opportunity.”

Now, after living in his new geothermal heated and cooled home, Taylor is even more convinced that he and his wife made the right decision. Not only are they enjoying utility bills that are at least \$100 less per month



Darise and Todd Taylor stand in front of their home in The Springs at Settlers Ridge



ClimateMaster Builder Development Manager Titian Burris kneels beside a ClimateMaster Geothermal Heat Pump in a home attic in Somer's Pointe.

than what they experienced in a similarly sized previous home, they have come to realize geothermal really was the ideal choice for their current property. The home they chose has a small, low-maintenance backyard – no more than 10 yards deep. The last thing Taylor wanted was to have a loud condensing unit taking up precious outdoor space. Instead, the geothermal heat pump that is located in their attic is not only out of the way, it is so quiet that the Taylors hardly notice when it is on.

Taylor is just as pleased with his experience working with Ideal Homes – a company that he likens to a “well-oiled machine.”

“I was very impressed with Ideal Homes through every step of the whole transaction. I really can't say enough good things about the experience,” said Taylor.

Sonya McFee, who purchased a home in Somer's Pointe, is equally delighted with her choice.

“Caddo County Electric and Ideal Homes are truly ahead of the game in making geothermal accessible for the average homeowner,” said McFee. “Taking upfront costs and logistics out of the mix, they've enabled people like me to take advantage of the significant savings a geothermal home can offer. I'm excited to no longer have to worry about the thermostat during the hot summer months in Oklahoma, and also to have an HVAC system that operates so comfortably and quietly.”

## Driven To Deliver Energy Efficiency

In 2014, Ideal Homes expects to sell 36 more homes in Somer's Pointe and 24 more homes in The Springs

at Settlers Ridge. The builder's approach to selling the benefits of geothermal in these homes is straightforward, and fostered by years of tailoring the efficiency message to potential homebuyers.

“We're trying to give people a logical reason to make an emotional decision,” said Shoemaker. “Home buying is an emotional decision and you can only go so far with logic. So we try and simplify the message. It boils down to this: ‘Geothermal is the most technologically advanced way to heat and cool your home. Here's how it works and here's the money it saves you.’”

Keeping customers satisfied after the sale takes experience, commitment and accountability. Ideal Homes is well aware that geothermal systems can only deliver peak efficiency if they are properly applied. Having worked closely with geothermal heat pump manufacturer ClimateMaster for several years, the builder is confident they can get the job done right. And if they have a question, they are fortunate that ClimateMaster's corporate office is also regional to Oklahoma City.



Sonya McFee and her home in Somer's Pointe

“We love our local connection with ClimateMaster,” said Shoemaker. “We also appreciate their product. We place a pretty high value on the products that we put in our homes, particularly as we're the ones that are held accountable for their performance. ClimateMaster's quality and service has been great. Any issues or questions we've had, ClimateMaster has always been very helpful.”

Many things have factored into the growth and success of Ideal Homes. However, Ideal Homes' willingness to take the road less traveled is what truly separates the company from so many of its competitors.



ClimateMaster is the world's largest and most progressive manufacturer of geothermal heat pumps. We are committed to innovation and dedicated to environmentally clean, economically sound and superbly comfortable home and business environments. Each ClimateMaster product is produced in our state-of-the-art facility utilizing quality management systems that are ISO 9001:2008 certified. We strive for the highest product quality and service after the sale to give you peace of mind.

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