

03/09/06

Very happy with alternative heat

By Leah Nell Peterson

The rising cost of fuel has caused many people to look for alternative heating sources - some of them have turned to corn stoves, wood stoves, and wood furnaces.

Wood Furnaces

Paul Ballman of Cannon Falls has been interested in alternative heating sources for a long time. "I bought a corn stove about six years ago," he said. "I really liked it but it only heats part of my house and I'm tired of hauling corn into my basement twice a day."

Paul sells wood furnaces by Central Boiler. "The distinction between wood furnaces and corn stoves is that the wood furnace puts out from 150,000 to 500,000 BTUs to heat anything from a small house to a large commercial building," explained Ballman. "My corn stoves put out 45,000 BTUs."

Central Boiler's wood furnace stands outside of the building it heats. Paul explained how it works. "Just imagine a fire box inside of a water tank. The water completely surrounds the fire box," he said.

The design of the fire box traps fire and hot gases and allows a more complete burn before the gases are allowed to escape," he continued. "The furnace has a chimney

that exits the rear, so hot gases don't just escape off the top of the fire.

"The ripple top of the firebox does two things, it traps gases for a more complete burn and gives more surface space to transfer heat from the fire into the water."

Advantages

One advantage of his furnace, Paul said, is that it can burn wood and/or corn.

"My wood furnace will heat my entire house, my domestic hot water, my shop, my wife's studio, and a hot tub," Paul said.

"Another advantage is that the firebox is five feet deep. So when you cut wood, you're not cutting the traditional two foot size - you can cut wood up to five feet long, and even longer with the larger size furnace," he pointed out. "Not cutting small pieces and not having to use a wood splinter is a huge time saver.

"Typically you'll feed this once a day, so you don't always have to put wood in.

"In addition, the furnace can be put up to 500 feet away from the building it heats.

"The smoke, dust, mess - everything, stays outside!" Paul stated.

The wood furnace works

automatically. "The thermostat in a wood furnace goes up to 185 degrees, and an air damper on the furnace will automatically close when the water is up to that temperature," Paul explained. "When the water cools, the air damper will automatically open and supplies more oxygen to the hot coals and warms the water back up again."

With the wood furnace, the heating system people already have in their home stays as it is - for a back up. "People have heard about alternative heating, but they don't know that it works with in-floor heat, hot water heat, forced air," Paul said.

One customer told Paul, "This is one of the very few tangible ways to show we've really saved money."

The Johnsons

Jason and Shelley Johnson agree with this. "We can keep our house warmer now without worrying about the cost," they said.

"We had it up and running right before Christmas," Jason added. "It's the best invention that ever was... I absolutely love it.

"We did a summer fill of our propane tank and from then to December, I burned up 500 gallons. From December to

now I used 20 gallons! The only thing I'm running now on my propane is the clothes dryer.

"It works out really nice," he explained. "I go out in the morning and stir the coals and throw on about four or five 6-inch diameter branches in two to three foot sections. Then I throw on two 12 to 14 inch trunks that I cut in one to two foot sections. I can't lift two-foot sections of oak!"

"That stove will literally burn solid logs! I don't have to split anything...that's what I love about it. All I do is run my saw. Once I cut the tree up – my work is done.

"When I get home from work at 4:30, I do the exact same thing again and that'll be good 'til morning. It's all automatic – all I do is add wood.

"We've been running the thermostat at 72 degrees. Our house is so warm now!"

The furnace itself runs from \$4,000 for a small home to \$20,000 for a large commercial building. "That's just the price of the furnace," Paul said. "An insulated underground tube to supply heat to the house and accessories are also needed to complete the installation. We work with the customer to keep costs as low as possible because that's what it's all about...saving money."

Corn Stoves

Ted Erlanson and his dad Harvey Erlanson of Cannon Falls have been selling Countryside corn stoves made in Hutchinson for over six years.

"They sell themselves once people see how cheap they are to run," Ted said. "They require on average a bushel of corn on a cold day. That's

cheap – the cost of a bushel of corn to heat your house per day! And the amount of electricity you use is equal to a 100 watt light bulb."

There are different sizes corn stoves and they put out approximately 55,000 BTUs. "The ones we sell mostly are the bigger ones that cost \$2,400," Harvey said.

This doesn't include the cost of pipe for venting it out. "The exhaust on it takes a three-inch stainless steel pipe," Ted explained, "so it's a lot less expensive than the class A chimney you'd need for wood."

Advantages

"You just carry in the corn – you don't have to cut, split, or stack wood," Ted said. "Our corn stove heats the whole house.

"Also, there's no creosote and no chance of a chimney fire."

The Neumanns

Vince and Krissy Neumann bought a corn stove from Ted and Harvey around 2001. "We're very pleased with it," Vince said. "We bought it to heat our basement, but it heats our whole house.

The heat is even, it's very easy to clean and the maintenance is zero," he added.

It burns about a bushel of shelled corn a day when the temperature is about 20 degrees and about a bushel and a half when it's below 20 degrees.

"Corn was \$2 a bushel this year, and I maybe burn between 250 to 300 bushels a year," he explained. "They've begun paying people for using electric cars and I wish the government would give some sort of rebate for burning an alternative fuel source."

Vince said that he grew up with his parents burning wood. "I didn't want to get back into that," he stated. "With corn – there's no cutting or splitting wood. You just dump in corn twice a day and walk away. I clear out the ashes out of a tray at the bottom and vacuum it out with the shop vac once a week.

"Mine runs all the time. I never shut it off or have any problems with it," he continued.

"Our heater hasn't kicked in once this year," Krissy added, "That's nice on the heating bill."

The temperature in the Neumann's home is 70 degrees or higher during the day with the corn stove running on medium. Vince said the average temperature at night is 65 degrees. They have their furnace thermostat set at 50 degrees, so just in case the corn stove goes out, the furnace will kick in.

They don't have any trouble with it going though. "I think it really depends on the dryness of your corn," Vincent said. "You want it as dry as you can get it. I buy my corn from Chip Callister and I've convinced him to use a corn stove too.

"One more thing I like about them... they're safe. If something would go wrong with the stove, it will just shut off because it needs a certain amount of flame to burn. I'm sold on my corn stove!"

To get more information on corn stoves, call Ted Erlanson at 263-5586 or Harvey at 263-5621. To find out more about wood furnaces, call Paul Ballman at 612-205-3630.