

# Czech Living

## Cottages attract public at open house in Wilson

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WILSON COUNTY I-R

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WILSON - A new addition to the landscape of downtown Wilson was welcomed Saturday as David Criswell, developer of Czech Cottages LLC, held an open house at the cottage.

"I'm very excited," Criswell said. "It feels nice to finally reach this stage."

Touting affordable retirement living, the Czech Cottages offer two unfurnished apartments each with one bedroom, a sitting room, bath, combination laundry room/safe room, kitchen, dining room and living room. The major appliances such as stove, refrigerator, washer/dryer and garbage disposal, are provided. They are strategically located across the street from the Wilson Senior Center. They are within walking distance of Wilson Family Foods, the Wilson Post Office, the Lang Memorial Library, the Wilson State Bank and a downtown medical clinic.

"The officials at the Kansas Department of Commerce and Housing told me they have never seen an affordable housing project this well positioned in the community," Criswell said. "That will help the tenants because they won't be tied to their automobiles."

The cottages are constructed using unique straw bale building techniques.

Criswell said in developing the Czech Cottages, he wanted to accomplish two main things.

"I wanted to do something I felt would be positive to the community," he said. "Something that would fill a niche. Because I have been very interested in straw bale construction for quite a few years, I wanted to build something that was straw bale."

Criswell said that because of the potential energy savings, he is a firm believer in straw bale construction techniques.

"I think it is a very sound way to build," he explained. "There are challenges with it, it's labor intensive. It will use very little energy compared to a lot of buildings which are just energy guzzlers. I think people will be very appreciative each month when they get their gas and electric bill."

In building his structure, Criswell hopes it will provide an example in terms of energy efficiency which people from Wilson and the surrounding area can use to develop their own energy-efficient structures.

Now that the first of three planned duplexes has been built, Criswell said he is very pleased with how everything went together.

"A real positive testament to the quality of this project is that an architect, Jim Putnam of Hutchinson, who has reviewed and approved the construction as it has progressed, has been thoroughly delighted with the quality

of the materials that have gone into everything," Criswell said.

The building was designed and built by Criswell and Todd Hanzlicek of Hanzlicek Construction of Wilson.

"I just can't say enough positive about the quality of the work Todd has done and the quality of materials he has used," Criswell said. "It's all been first-rate."

Criswell said the high degree of quality found in the materials at Czech Cottages was necessary to take full advantage of what straw bale construction techniques had to offer.

"It doesn't make sense to have an R-50 wall and R-50 attic if you've got cheap windows and doors, so we don't," he said. "These are very high quality Pella windows with double-pane, low-e glass. The doors are very high quality - it's a very well constructed building."

Criswell said he was also very happy with Larry Ptacek of Mike's Plumbing and Heating of Wilson for installing all the plumbing and electrical needs as well as fixtures and appliances.

"This couldn't have been done without Todd and Larry," he added.

Besides being energy-efficient, the Czech Cottages also feature laundry rooms that double as a "safe room."

Built to Federal Emergency Management Agency standards, the walls and ceiling of the safe room have two layers of three-quarter inch plywood and a one-

eight inch thick steel plate. This is in addition to the studs and sheet rock. Everything is bolted down to the concrete slab. The room stands independent of the rest of the structure.

"The idea is that if you had winds that were strong enough to tear away some or all of the rest of the house, that room is still going to stand there," Criswell said.

The door of the safe room, unlike the other hollow core interior doors found inside the rest of the duplex, is a solid heavy-duty wood door with a steel plate and three locks.

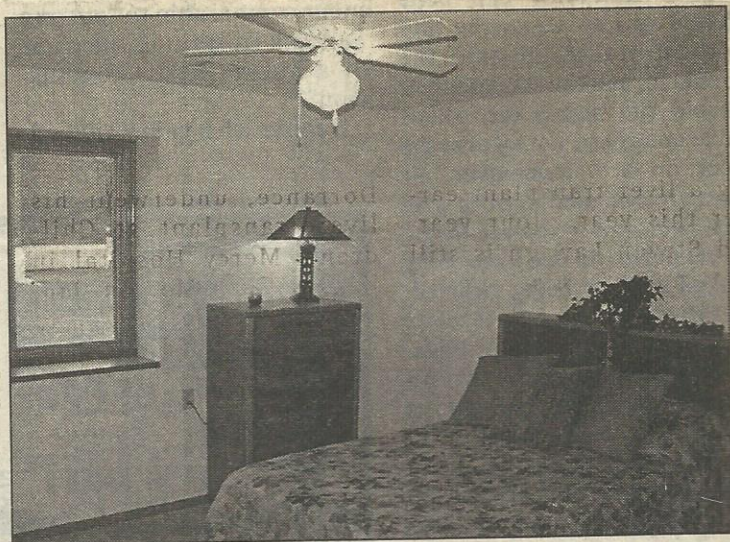
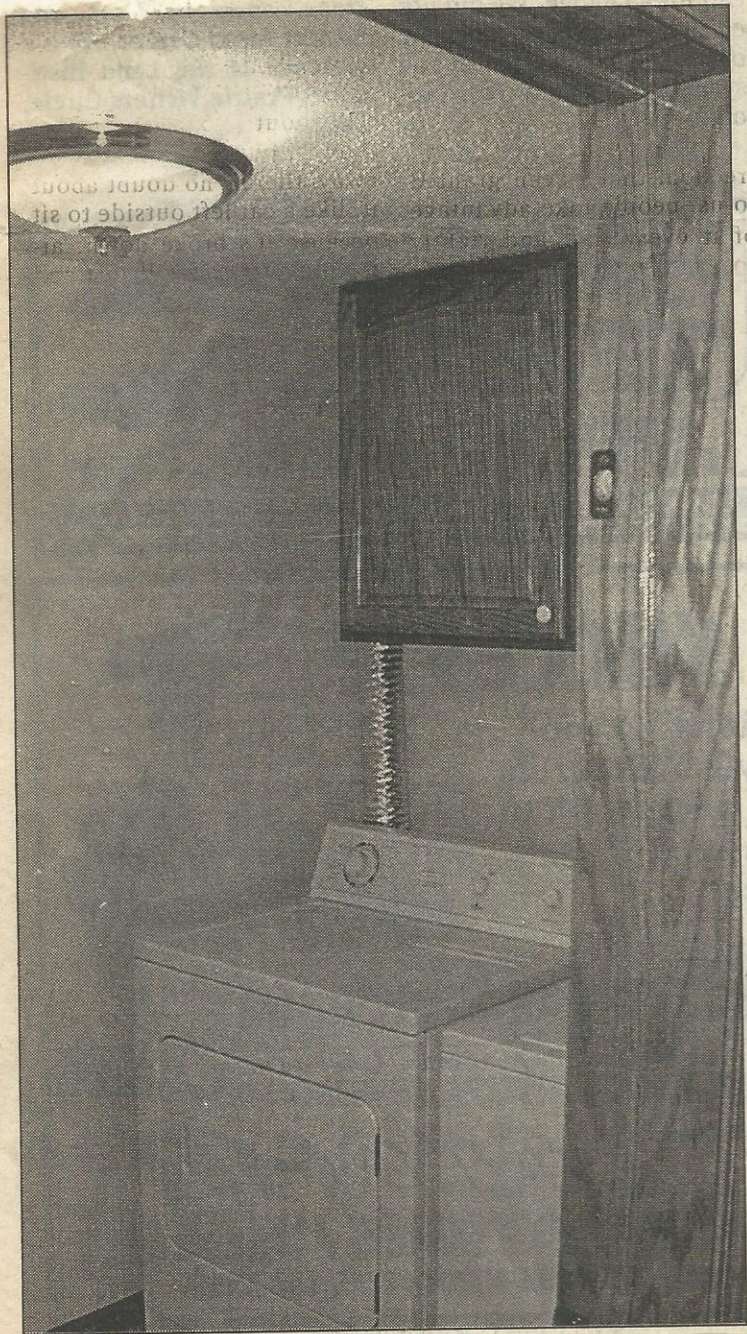
Criswell said that certain federal guidelines exist for those wishing to live at Czech Cottages, based on income as well as age.

If the applicant is single, he or she has to be 55 years of age or older. If the applicants are married, one person has to be 55 years of age or older.

"This is affordable housing," Criswell said. "But the people who will live here are not poor by any means. They can have a fairly decent income and have quite a bit of financial assets and still qualify to live here."

Criswell said work on the two other planned duplexes that will make up Czech Cottages will be started as soon as the remainder of the needed funds are raised.

"This is going to be a very attractive development," Criswell said. "It's going to be very high-quality in terms of the quality of life I think that people can expect when they live here."



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Above, the spacious bedroom in one of the two duplexes at the Czech Cottages. Left, the laundry room doubles as a safe room. Below, plans are for two additional duplexes to be built soon.

