

Four Corners

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Greenhouse business grows with owners' unique vision

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Kenneth's wish came true when he Make A Wish Foundation, along with Growing Spaces, gave him a Growing Dome.

Photo courtesy of the Make A Wish Foundation



PAGOSA SPRINGS — It's not often that business owners give the impression that they're not just making a living but trying to make a difference. The owners of Growing Spaces, Udgar and Puja Parsons, have created a unique product that can have resounding effects on health, environment, and community, all starting in the most important place — one's own backyard.

Their product, The Growing Dome, can be described in simple terms as a greenhouse. But it is

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not simply a greenhouse. Seven features set the Growing Dome apart from others, because its design embraces the concept of energy efficiency to the fullest.

"The design hasn't changed in 18 years, so I must have done something right," Udgar said. "Basically in the winter, we capture as much of the heat from the sun as we can, we store it inside the dome's water tank and then blow hot air into the soil. At night we slow down the heat loss by a lot of insulation — the north wall is insulated, the foundation wall is insulated. The automatic systems — the water tank, the windows, the cooling fan — are all solar-powered and operate to keep it cool in the summer. Also, the dome shape is much more energy efficient than a rectangular shape, which has much more surface area. It's a very even heat input throughout the day."

Word in the Rocky Mountains has caught on: it is possible to grow during winter's harsh four- or five-month run. In Archuleta County there are more than 70 Growing Domes, and more than 20 in Durango. There are Growing Domes in 42 states across the country, according to Udgar,

including Alaska and New York, with the number of international patrons increasing also. "We're just about to ship one to New Zealand. We've had inquiries from South America, Africa. A little company in the Four Corners region is international, and it's just going to get bigger. We are in the process of setting up a manufacturing plant in France to serve the European market."

Not bad for what started as a family-run business out of the Parsons' garage in 1989. Growing Spaces' success can be attributed to the foundation of most small-business success stories: taking an idea and running with it. But the Parsons have gone a step further: they've taken their lifestyle and run with it. The couple has been practicing self-sufficient living since the early 70s, when Udgar gave up a career as a dentist and orthodontist to live on a farm in his native Scotland. "I like the phrase living lightly on the land," Udgar said, "because we live on a planet that has limited resources and we're already using them up. We have this tremendous amount of free energy in the form of solar, wind, tides. If you go to Scotland or England, you see windmills that were built 300 years ago that

Make a Wish Foundation. While most Make a Wish children ask for things like a shopping spree or a meeting with their favorite celebrity, Kenneth wanted a space to grow flowers and vegetables after extensively researching greenhouses on the Web.

"We were thrilled and surprised that someone's wish was to have a Dome," Puja recalled. "He wanted it to be a living legacy to his family, but he also wanted it for the sake of a good diet. We think people can heal of cancer with a green diet that has lots of enzymes, so it might actually help him."

Although the Make a Wish Foundation provided a budget, the budget was less than the Dome's cost, so the Growing Spaces team donated their work and raised the remaining cost. They contacted Global Children's Gardens, a non-profit organization that teaches children the many benefits of organic gardening, which donated \$1,000. All and all, about 40 hours worth of work went into getting Kenneth his 15-foot Growing Dome.

The Parsons have also been rewarded with seeing their domes used as educational tools in classrooms, including the Colorado Rocky Mountain School in Carbondale, Colo., the Southern Ute Academy in Ignacio, and Bayfield

High's "Model for the Nation" living classroom, where students and harvest herbs and vegetables and experiment with solar power, fish reproduction, and plant hybrids.

Big business has also taken to the domes: a Toyota manufacturing plant in Georgetown, Ky, has instituted a composting program with the plant's organic waste, and with the aid of a 50-foot-diameter Growing Dome, the plant uses the compost to grow produce for the cafeteria.

Success is just beginning to blossom for Growing Spaces and the Parsons, who try to adhere to what they call a "new business culture," which Udgar explained as doing business based on certain principles, like the principle of connectedness. "The strength of the dome is in the connection of all its components, and we have a Growing Dome network where dome owners connect with each other, a forum for sales associates. It's also about caring for each other, caring for the planet. Whatever we do, there's no such thing as waste."

Another integral part of this new business culture, said Udgar, is that they try to enjoy what they do and have fun. "It's not all about success and failure; it's about process."

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