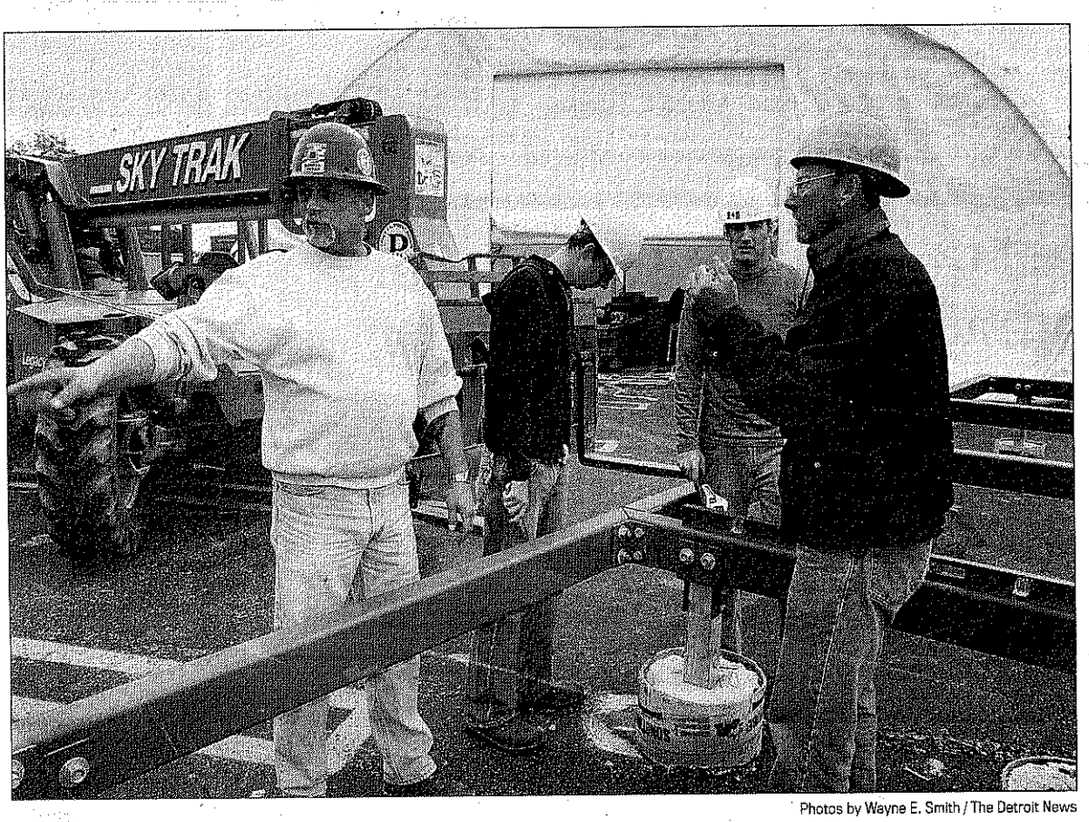


Photos by Wayne E. Smith / The Detroit News

Lawrence Tech's Team ALOeTERRA, which includes Mark Beever, left, Tyler Walker, Ben Gregory and Jeff Kruse, works Tuesday on its entry for the Solar Decathlon in October. They'll face rivals from MIT and Cornell University.

Lawrence Tech team takes solar challenge

Team works on concept home for contest featuring wordly mix of bright ideas.

By Tony Gonzalez
The Detroit News

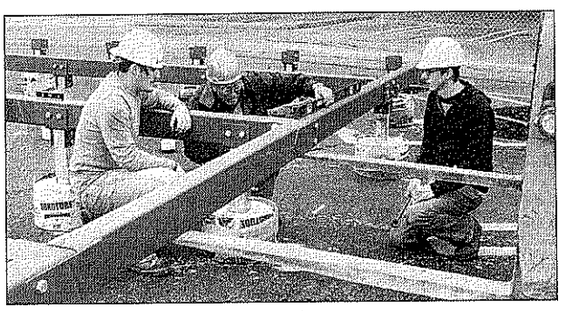
SOUTHFIELD — When Lawrence Technological University students take their solar home to Washington, D.C., in October, they'll put their design beside projects from 19 teams from around the world, including Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Cornell University.

The solar homes will be evaluated on their energy-efficient design, comfort and market viability, and be displayed to the public as part of the Solar Decathlon, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

Southfield

But first, students must build them. Architects, engineers and builders from Lawrence Tech's Team ALOeTERRA began construction Tuesday under a protective white dome in a university parking lot. "The attitude is 'we've got a chance to win,'" said Tina Span, 27, a Lawrence Tech architecture graduate.

While the team is based at a smaller university than most competitors, Span said the team has fresh energy ideas and is depending upon a risky and unorthodox U-shaped floor plan.



Gregory, left, Kruse and Walker help ensure level construction. Architects, engineers and builders are teaming on the event to be held in Washington, D.C.

Team members say the larger-school competition is more experienced, but they're making up for that by working as many as 80 hours a week during the construction phase of the now two-year-old project.

"I get here around 8 a.m. and maybe leave around 1 a.m.," said Elliott Schmitt, a 24-year-old mechanical engineering graduate.

He said class time, senior projects and nearly 50 volunteers contributed.

"It's not just building a home. It's building a home you're going to tear down, ship to D.C. and reassemble in nine days," Schmitt said.

While the home is displayed on the National Mall, the team will tout its ability to generate power for appliances and an electric car.

Engineering graduate Steve Tominac, 22, said uniting engineers with architects benefits the project and helps often separated departments work together. Span said the level of pressure and challenge of making theoretical calculations fit uncertain construction conditions has real-life applications.

Dennis Howie, associate vice president for advancement and chief development officer at Lawrence Tech, said the team has raised $430,000 of a targeted $550,000 project budget.

Span and Schmitt said Michigan faces solar challenges.

"A lot of times when you say 'solar panels' in Michigan, people laugh at you," Span said. "We designed this house to come back and stay in Michigan."

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