



# Down to earth living

## HOMETOWN TOURIST

*Green 'Giant'  
is nestled  
between —  
and under —  
the trees along  
Fall Creek*

*"Do not worry if you have built your castles in the air. They are where they should be. Now put the foundations under them."*

*— Henry David Thoreau, from "Walden"*

**By Zach Dunkin**

[zach.dunkin@indystar.com](mailto:zach.dunkin@indystar.com)

PENDLETON, Ind. — Vic Cook stood before the small group seated on hay bales surrounding a diminishing campfire and asked for a show of hands.

"How many of you think I'm crazy?" polled the music teacher/musician/builder/artist/environmentalist.

A dozen of us have just toured Cook's energy-efficient home/museum/recording studio/bomb shelter called "The Giant." Buried deep within a forest along Fall Creek about a mile southwest of downtown Pendleton, the free-form structure juts 38 feet skyward and stretches 254 feet in length. Half of it is underground.

The Giant blends in with the forest because it *is* the forest: Cook built the home with his own hands, foraging trees >>

JOE VITTI / The Sta

Vic Cook, a musician, architect and artist, sits on his vintage U.S. Army Jeep parked in the middle of a virgin forest in Pendleton, where for the past 25 years he has been building "The Giant," a home inspired by his and his father's love of nature.

MICHELLE PEMBERTON / The Star 2006 file photo

THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR • INDYSTAR.COM  
THE INDIANAPOLIS STAR • INDYSTAR.COM



The home, almost as long as a football field, has a pipe that directs rain runoff to a holding tank. The house's fuel bill is about \$1 a day.

>> from the 2.5-acre tract and gathering stones from the nearby creek. He used about 25 different kinds of wood in the house. Construction cost: \$3,500.

Since 1978, the 64-year-old has spent nearly 40,000 hours building what he says is his "monument to nature." The home has been featured on HGTV's "Extreme Homes" and PBS's "Across Indiana." The Giant is open to the public for tours by appointment from May through October. Guests meet near the Community Building in Falls Park and then caravan through town to the home's secluded location.

The tour, which takes from 90 minutes to two hours, depending on how long Cook talks at its conclusion, begins with a half-mile, single-file hike on a dirt trail through a hardwood forest.

Along the way, tour guide Sue Blakely offers a history of the house, explaining how it was built and what's inside it. Also an environ-

Cook turned a hollow beech log into a natural refrigerator. The trunk was positioned over a hole dug into the earth, and uses the natural cooling to help cool food.



JOE VITTI / The Star

Vic Cook has no need to give up such modern extras as a big-screen TV, which runs off solar power. Cook has built a model of the house for display at the State Fair.

mentalist, Blakely is president of nonprofit Earthship Corp. and has been Cook's volunteer guide for 20 years.

She tells us Cook "hasn't had a utility bill since he moved in." He gets his energy from the sun and water from the clouds — although he supplements his supplies with bottled water and a gasoline-powered generator. Property taxes are less than \$200 a year because no electricity runs to the property.

A small bank of solar cells collects enough rays to charge six storage batteries, which power the interior lighting, but also Cook's recording studio, computer, washing machine and TV.

Once inside, visitors are led through a narrow, multi-level passageway past Cook's studio and stage, a kitchen equipped with a sink, stove and oven, a bathroom that has the only door in the house, and a cozy bedroom where a flat-screen TV hangs. >>

## If you go

**What:** The Giant.  
**Where:** Pendleton.

**How to get there:** Visitors meet at the Community House parking lot in Falls Park. From Indianapolis, take I-69 to Pendleton/Exit 19, go east 1.3 miles on Ind. 38, then left for 0.1 mile on North Main Street to park entrance.

**Tours:** By appointment only. Cost is \$6 for adults and \$4 for children younger than 18. Call (765) 778-2757.

**Information:**  
[www.giantearthship.com](http://www.giantearthship.com).

**AAA** Travel Agent  
**Ask about AAA Travel**  
**AAA - Your Royal Call**

**Imagine the Adventure**  
**Western** | **S**