



PHOTO: GABRIEL LENO

Rancho Cielo Team Takes Top Honors in Sustainable Housing Competition

BY RENEE BRINCKS

Part of the Rancho Cielo Team stands proudly in front of their project, the Nexus 01 House, for which they won first place in the Orange County Sustainability Decathlon.

Rancho Cielo Construction Academy students earned national attention in October, after their elegant, energy-efficient modular home won first place at the Orange County Sustainability Decathlon.

The event showcased innovative housing solutions by students from 15 colleges and universities. Rancho Cielo was the smallest school to compete. Through a start-up called Nexus Housing, the Salinas team drew support from Hayward Lumber, Scudder Roofing, Don Chapin Company, Ferguson and many other local businesses.

Ecologie Architects Founder Thomas Rettonwender spearheaded the project. "A lot of housing is incredibly expensive. If we can rethink how we do things, we can bring costs down and have a lasting impact," he says. "The most sustainable measure of all

is to educate our youth."

About 40 Rancho Cielo vocational students helped build the 850-square-foot home, which has an advanced air filtration system, fire-resistant features, solar power, and bonus loft and patio space. Participants gained confidence throughout the construction, presentation and judging process.

"When the students started seeing us win, they just bloomed," Rettonwender says.

The completed home will anchor a planned 13-unit ecovillage at Rancho Cielo, and it's one of four Nexus Housing models available for public preorder.

"The project really has opened our eyes to what's possible, and we're excited to grow," Rettonwender says.

To view house plans and support the project, please visit www.renchoceilo.org.