Building a better house

Wyoming company improves animal cages

By KIMBERLY MANN
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After watching caged animals pace from one end of their pens to the other, Bill Britz and Gail Heidbrink came up with an innovation to provide animals with a more comfortable and entertaining living environment.

The two have accumulated a great deal of education and training in the laboratory animal medicine and technology field, so they had the knowledge and experience necessary to develop their idea.

With the help of Dr. David Walrath, University of Wyoming professor of mechanical engineering, Britz and Heidbrink pioneered the use of composite materials, powder coating, neoprene surfaced floor panels and excreta pan support rails to produce thermo-neutral, quiet and relatively more pleasant animal houses.

Walrath developed a “sandwich construction” of foam core, fiberglass skins and epoxy matrix. Printed fabric—from Wal-Mart’s craft section—was then added to create a pleasing environment for the captive animal. In addition to the colorful “walls” in the houses, the animals might also have an “enrichment center.”

Some of the “enrichment centers” built by the company include rabbit hills and cat condos.

Britz-Heidbrink, Inc., located in Wheatland, has been acknowledged not only in Wyoming, it also has received national recognition for its technological innovation by the Small Business Innovation Research Program. Britz and Heidbrink demonstrate some features of the innovative cage she and Bill Britz manufacture in Wheatland.