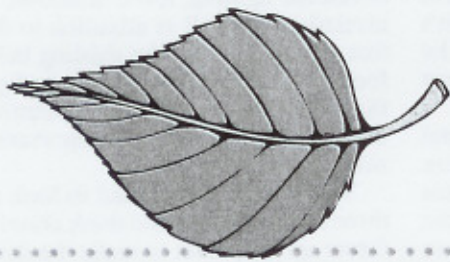


The benefits of GREEN BUILDING



Story by Rachel Robertson

Incentives offered for energy-efficient construction

Mountains, ocean, forest—everywhere you look in the Pacific Northwest there is natural beauty. And many of the people drawn to this area are motivated to protect it. Socially and environmentally minded individuals participating in the building industry have contributed to making the Pacific Northwest a leader in “green building”—building design that lessens the impact on the environment through energy efficiency, water conservation, use of sustainable materials, and responsible site development. Yet, even though it is now the fastest growing segment of the building industry, it is in its infancy, and area businesses are finding they still need to educate their clients on the benefits of green building.

Jason F. McLennan, CEO of the Cascadia Region Green Building Council, reports that the growth curve for green building is exponential. “It’s just exploding. It’s very exciting,” he says. The Cascadia area (Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia) claims the most Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-accredited professionals and green building projects than any other region.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

McLennan says, “Even though we have a lot of good news to talk about regarding the trends and the adoption of green building principles, when you look at the large pattern science that is emerging all over the globe regarding climate change and many other trends such as habitat loss and species loss—we actually have very little time in which to make significant changes to the way we build and operate our communities.”

In fact, the building sector contributes nearly half of the U.S. greenhouse gas

emissions, buildings demand 39 percent of all energy used in the United States, and construction and demolition of buildings contribute to 24 percent of the total municipal solid waste (95 percent of building waste is recyclable).

HOW IS GREEN BUILDING MEASURED?

The U.S. Green Building Council (of which Cascadia is one chapter) developed the LEED Green Building Rating System™ as a way to quantify the “greenness” of a building. Points are awarded for meeting specified criteria, and the certification level (Certified, Silver, Gold, or Platinum) is based on the total number of points achieved. Although the initial rating systems were designed for commercial and public buildings, a new rating system for homes is in its pilot phase and is expected to be fully launched this summer.

Many local home builders participate in Built Green™ Washington, which has regional programs such as Whatcom County’s, which is administered by the Building Industry Association of Whatcom County. Through a self-certification process, buildings can receive from one to five stars (or one to three in the case of Whatcom) based on the number of sustainable features that were incorporated. The Whatcom County’s Built Green™ program, for example, has a checklist of 260 items ranging from energy efficiency to indoor air quality.

Energy Star—the familiar blue sticker on energy-efficient home appliances—is a program sponsored jointly by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy. Energy Star homes exceed the minimum regulations of the International Residential Code for energy use by at least 15 percent. To help motivate builders, local utilities such as

Puget Sound Energy, in partnership with Energy Star, offer incentives for installing energy efficient appliances and heating systems.

HOW DO THESE PROGRAMS HELP?

Nick Hartrich, manager of the Green Building Program for Sustainable Connections, believes these programs—particularly the Energy Star partnership with utilities—has helped convince more builders to jump on the green building bandwagon. But Hartrich sees the writing on the wall. “The utilities pay builders pretty large incentives to participate in these programs that are right now voluntary, and I think that in the next several years you are going to see that these programs are going to be required,” he says, predicting that high-efficiency fixtures and appliances will eventually become code.

The simple existence of the LEED rating system allowed for Washington State to pass a law that requires all newly constructed state funded buildings larger than 5,000 square feet to meet the LEED Silver standard.

Russ Weiser, architect and LEED accredited professional, believes that having a point system guides clients to make the best choices. “It’s amazing how powerful that really is,” he says. “People are pretty competitive—going for the gold.” Weiser also noticed a change in the suppliers. “When I first started doing research on the materials, especially for LEED requirements, I’d ask about the recycled content of their materials. They didn’t know,” he says. But now many suppliers provide lists of how their materials meet LEED standards.

SEE GREEN ON PAGE 32

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A PICTURE OF GROWTH

HKP Architects of Mount Vernon traces its roots of sustainable design back to its founder, Henry Klein, who started the business in 1952. He was trained in Modern Architecture style, which championed simple design. "We try to do with less ... solve things in a simple way," says HKP partner David Hall. Through the years their designs for schools, homes, and government buildings have included such green features as passive solar, durable materials, and natural ventilation

instead of air conditioning. "Building well, building solid, building to last is very important," says Hall. "And building something that people feel is worth keeping because it functions well or it's beautiful is important, too." Although he also admits, "You have to go beyond just that."

The North Cascades Environmental Learning Center is one example where they have gone beyond. HKP expects the project will be certified at the LEED Silver standards with features such as a pedestrian campus, use of

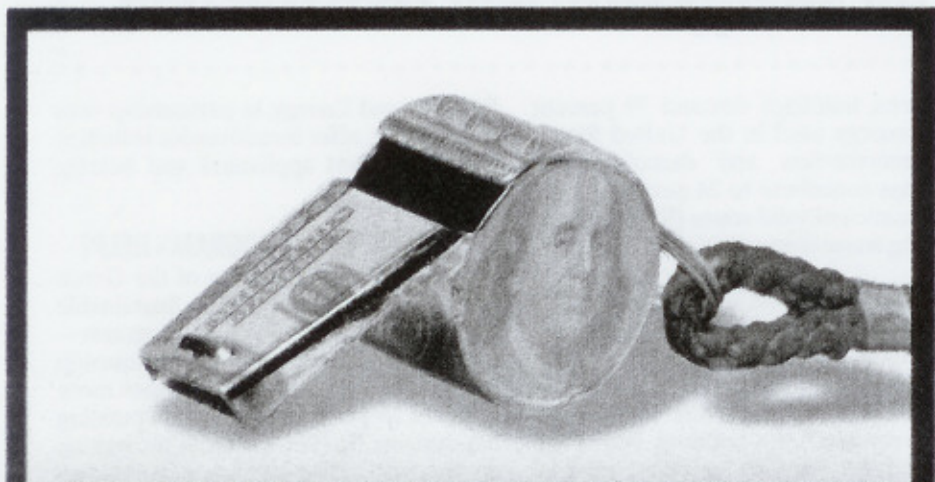
sustainable materials (FSC certified wood and recycled products), and energy conservation measures (high efficiency florescent lighting, low-e windows, extra insulation); as well as attention to details like working within the existing building footprint, and creating outdoor lighting that doesn't cause light pollution of the night sky (especially important in a wilderness area).

William Maris only had to look at his three small children and think about their future on the planet to make the decision to build differently. Growing up in the construction business, he was aware of builder's lack of concern for the huge amount of waste they produced. "It was rather frustrating to us at the time when we were seeing this waste occur, so that was one of the main things that finally tipped us [to green building]."

Cabochon, the Bellingham construction and development company that he and his wife, Paula Maris started, has always focused on sustainable building for moderately priced housing. Their commitment to green building grew over their 10 years in operation, and two years ago Maris hired Emily Reid, a LEED accredited professional, as Cabochon's sustainability coordinator to help research green materials and techniques. In addition to building green, Maris wanted to build affordably, and their extensive research eventually led them to modular construction techniques. The problem was they couldn't find a supplier who was willing to work with them on designing green. The solution? A new company, Maris decided.

Thus, Transform emerged—a new modular manufacturing facility currently under construction in Burlington. Headed by President Steve Benner, they are expecting to be in production a mere 18 months after Maris's decision to form it. "The efficiencies of the factory environment, coupled with the purchasing power that comes from the large volume that we'll be doing, will really allow us to incorporate green building practices much more affordably than most site-built contractors," says Benner.

What are the benefits? "It's just a better way to build," says Reid. "It's the responsible thing to do for the environment, for the people living in the buildings, and also for our employees who are in the factory working around materials that are low emitting."



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SEE GREEN ON PAGE 33

GREEN...continued from page 32

As energy costs rise, the marketability of new and more efficient heating and cooling systems has increased. For example, Andgar Corporation in Ferndale installs geo-thermal heat pumps and radiant floor heating systems that can greatly improve energy efficiency.

Geo-thermal heating and cooling takes advantage of the constant temperature of the earth by running a solution through pipes in the ground to absorb that temperature and transfer it to a compressor. "For any one unit of energy that we use to run the compressors, or the pumps which run the solutions through the ground, we are extracting four units of energy out of the earth," says Dale VanRooyen of Andgar. "You can actually say that it's up to 400 percent more efficient than a standard heating appliance."

Radiant flooring, in which hot water is circulated through tubing in the floor, is not only more efficient but also improves indoor air quality.

ROOM FOR MORE GROWTH

Wesley Smith and Andrew Vallee felt that using local and sustainably harvested wood was the "right thing to do," according to Vallee, for building furniture and cabinets. Local, so that fewer fossil fuels are used in the transport of the wood: The maple they use, in fact, comes from a neighbor. And sustainably harvested, to lessen the impact on the forest.

However, their business, Smith & Vallee Woodworks in Deming (with a new showroom soon to open in Edison), has yet to see very many clients with the environment on their minds. "Maybe 5 to 10 percent of our clients are actually seeking us out because of that," Vallee says. And if a customer requests a wood they cannot get locally, they will have it shipped, but get it sustainably harvested when they can.

Rose Lathrop, of Aiki Homes in Bellingham, has found there is still a way to go as far as education and marketing for homes built with green principles, noting that in an MLS listing for a home there is no place to indicate it is a green home. "The market is expanding and there is definitely increased market awareness, but it's not quite to the point yet to where our real estate agents are familiar with green building, so they don't know how to sell it as a green building...and if the buyers don't understand that it's Built Green™ or what that means, then it doesn't mean anything," she says.

SMART GROWTH

Rob Staveland and Lance Illman, co-owners of Aiki Homes, had a vision to move beyond building green homes. Along with Marble Falls LCC of Bellingham, they have proposed Balfour Village, a planned development in Columbia Valley (north Whatcom County), of green homes with the goal of creating a community based on Smart Growth principles.

"Smart Growth is a different way of looking at development: Instead of pro-growth or no growth it's somewhere

in between where you can develop responsibly," Lathrop says. Creating walkable neighborhoods, providing attractive open spaces, and building a variety of housing to promote diversity of socio-economic range, are some examples of the 10 principles of Smart Growth. Lathrop, the project coordinator for the Balfour Village, explained that with the donation of land for a sheriff's substation, a fire station, and a community center, the development will also be bringing

SEE GREEN ON PAGE 39

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essential services to a location that is in dire need. "We've had a lot of support [within the community] for this development, which is really unheard of for developers," Lathrop says.

WHAT IS AHEAD?

Responding to the success of the industry's ability to meet the LEED Green Building standards, the Cascadia Region Green Building Council has issued the Living Building Challenge—a proposal to encourage the industry to go beyond the LEED Platinum standard and design buildings that have minimal impact on the earth: Buildings that produce as much energy as they expend, that have systems for capturing and treating water on site, and are designed to be beautiful as well as efficient.

The Lopez Community Land Trust (LCLT) is working with Seattle-based Mithun Architects, and already has a plan in the works to create a small community of affordable net-zero-energy homes. Sandy Bishop, LCLT executive director, hopes that it will serve as a model for others who are

interested in building sustainable communities.

Through Sustainable Connections, Nick Hartrich wants to inspire more green building incentives such as Whatcom County's new fast-track permitting recommendation for builders who participate in the LEED for homes or Built Green™ programs. "One of the most important things that I'm going to

be focusing on for 2007 is working with local governments and streamlining the relationship between these local governments and other industry partners like developers, contractors, and architects," he says. "I think there is a strong disconnect between the two, and in a lot of cases they are actually all talking about doing the same thing, and ultimately want to achieve the same goal." ■

UPCOMING GREEN BUILDING CONFERENCES

Spring Business Conference and Expo

Bellingham, April 20

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Living Future '07

Seattle, April 25-27

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