

Green Building Gains Momentum

Local Leaders Take the LEED on New Construction

Green building, once considered a niche market, is steadily working its way into mainstream construction. According to the National Association of Homebuilders, in 2005 green buildings constituted only 2% of new construction, but current projections are that that number will rise to between 5 and 10% by 2010.

So what is green building all about? The US Green Building Council (USGBC) says that it is about “transforming the way buildings and communities are designed, built and operated, enabling an environmentally and socially responsible, healthy, and prosperous environment that improves the quality of life.”

In more concrete terms (no pun intended), green building aims to conserve energy and water, reduce carbon emissions and environmental pollutants; and use materials that are made from sustainably harvested, recycled, or recyclable materials. It also means keeping construction and demolition materials (or “C&D”) out of our landfills.

To help guide the growing contingent of green builders (today numbering 91,000 professionals and partners in the U.S. alone!), the USGBC created the LEED Rating System. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design and is billed as “a practical rating tool for green building design and construction that provides immediate and measurable results.” Monterey County is home to two LEED Certified buildings: The Moss Landing Marine Laboratories (LEED Gold Existing Building) and Chartwell School. Chartwell is the first educational campus in America to achieve LEED’s highest rating level-- Platinum.

For small businesses, the prospect of incorporating green building practices can seem a little daunting, but there are small steps you can take to help make your building healthier for your employees and the planet.

Joe Piedimonte, Corporate Controller for Ausonio, Inc. says, “If you want to have a greener building, there are things that we can recommend that will not cost

you that much more.” Ausonio was the general contractor for the award-winning Chartwell School, but they understand that not every business has the potential to build a LEED Platinum facility. You may choose to incorporate some or all of the innovations that helped make Chartwell the greenest building in the county. Here are a few highlights:

- Chartwell utilizes natural lighting from skylights and windows to minimize fluorescents lamps.
- Automatic climate systems control the temperature and use the naturally cool coastal air to keep the classrooms comfortable.
- The building is crafted out of healthy, sustainable building materials such as carpeting made from recycled material. Unlike some building materials that continue to release the toxic chemicals used to make them for years after installation, Chartwell’s carpets do not off gas.

Piedimonte explains further: “When the teachers walked into the school for the first time, they said that it didn’t smell like a new building. That is a good thing. In many buildings the indoor air quality is worse than the outdoor air quality. We always focus on the benefits that people will get from the building.”

Green Building is not just good for people and the planet; it can also be good for profit. Many businesses assume that making environmentally responsible business decisions will cost them more, but in most cases that assumption is incorrect. Recent studies by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development show that even building professionals overestimate the cost premium for a green building by 300%. In reality, if you start with a comprehensive plan, a green building will only cost about 5% more than its conventional counterpart.

In some cases, government rebates and energy savings can readily offset that premium. The long term financial gains that accompany increased customer satisfaction and employee productivity are making green building a more attractive option here in the Salinas Valley.

The Housing Authority of the



Seaside’s Chartwell School has been called “America’s Greenest School,” because it is the first educational campus to attain LEED Platinum.

County of Monterey (HACOM) has started to incorporate energy saving green building techniques into their developments. “We are finding that solar panels, with all of the tax credits and federal rebates, are paying for themselves now—not in 10 years like it used to be,” says HACOM Development Director Starla Warren.

“Salinas Aquatic Center is being put out to bid with the expectation that it will be LEED certified. Most of these projects promise opportunities to use local contractors, and there is a serious commitment to invest in the green movement in this

area,” says Piedimonte.

Monterey County has been helping to lead green building into the mainstream, and now the possibility of more sustainable construction is becoming a reality here in the Salinas Valley.

For more info on how to reduce construction and demolition waste, contact SVSWA at 775-3000. If you want to learn more about green building in Monterey County you can check out the USGBC Monterey Bay Chapter website at www.usgbc-ncc.org -- then click on Monterey Bay Chapter. Monterey.

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