

Green Hasn't Lost Momentum Across South Carolina

BY DAN MCCUE

Despite an economic slowdown that has tamped down on construction and inspired companies large and small to try to find new and innovative ways to cut costs, South Carolina continues to make great strides when it comes to incorporating sustainability and "green" into their operating plans.

In fact, according to Bill Gregory, director of sustainability for the Milliken Company, the philosophy of reuse, efficiency and innovation that is at the heart of the green movement may well be the thing that helps businesses weather the recession – no matter how long it lasts.

"Companies that strive for sustainability get a lot of recognition, but opting to embrace it really is a bottom line decision," Gregory said. "Once you put your sustainability glasses on, you'll start to find ways to lower your costs by being more efficient in a wide range of processes, and by simply reducing the waste you produce and the resources you consume. At the same time, I can't tell you how many times I've had an executive tell me they've expanded into new product areas they wouldn't have gotten into if it hadn't been for the green policies they adopted – sustainability can be a great lens for innovation."

While Milliken might be considered a bit ahead of the curve when it comes to the green movement – after all, the company adopted its first recycling policy in 1900 – a growing number of businesses and entities throughout the state have recently followed suit.

In the Midlands, the University of South Carolina made a statement with the opening of its "Green Quad," which the university said is the largest residence-hall complex of its kind in the world.

Officially called the West Quad, the 172,000-square-foot complex at the corner of Sumter and Wheat streets was built with a significant amount of recycled materials, ranging from the cement blocks and copper roof to the interior carpet. The heating, ventilation, cooling and fire suppression systems are all free of ozone-depleting substances, and the water used in the complex is preheated by the largest solar collection system of its kind on the East Coast. The project received a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Silver Certification from the U.S. Green Building council (USGBC).

The university also is currently working on its 356-room Honors Residence Hall, which is in its final stages of construction on the corner of Main and Blossom streets. The project is a replacement dorm for the previous "Honeycomb" towers and will house the USC Honors College students.



courtesy of Garvin Design Group

A Garvin Design Group project, it has received notification from the USGBC that it has earned 30 points through the design phase submittal review. Needing 39 points to achieve LEED Gold Certification, the project is well on its way to garnering the coveted status.

Outside of the academic realm, the engineering firms of Cox and Dinkins and Watson Tate Savory have both seen office buildings they've created in Columbia receive LEED Certification.

In Myrtle Beach, Beach First National Bank built the first green bank building in South Carolina and the southeastern U.S. The three-story, 46,000-square-foot building also is the first green building to be constructed along the Grand Strand and the first multi-tenant building in the state.

In addition, one residential development in Columbia, and three in the Grand Strand have received LEED Certification – developments that have helped propel the green homes trend in the state, ac-

The project is a reclamation effort, revitalizing a 65-acre brown-field site through the use of locally sourced materials and a diverse plant palette representative of the region.

Right now, the Upstate has the highest number of LEED certified buildings in the state, and both Furman and Clemson Universities have committed to green, with Furman – home to the Hipp Hall academic building, one of the state's first LEED certified buildings - going so far as to set a goal of having a carbon neutral campus.

"Efforts like these set a positive example for students who are our future decision makers," Crozier said, adding that current decision makers aren't doing too badly themselves.

"Milliken, for one, embraced corporate sustainability long before it was mainstream," she said. "And BMW has committed to sustainable manufacturing and business operations with renewable power generation at their Greer facility."

Beach First Center



cording to Jenny Wiedower, executive director of the South Carolina Chapter of the USGBC.

And it turns out, that's just a taste of the activity that's out there.

Companies embrace carbon neutrality

Architect Mary Pat Crozier, of Crozier Architecture in Taylor, said her firm, as well as Liollo Architecture, in Charleston, and the Johnston Design Group, in Greenville have all committed to the USGBC's 2030 challenge.

That means each has committed to the goal of reducing their businesses carbon footprint by 50 percent in 2009, and that they also are encouraging their clients to do the same, with the ultimate goal being to be carbon neutral by 2030.

Crozier, who also serves as the South Carolina chapter's education chair, said these actions are symptomatic of the growing green trend across the states.

"I have seen several companies decide to build a LEED certified building and through this process move to more sustainable operations, such as green cleaning, and education of employees and visitors about sustainable practices," she said. "The Carolina First Corporation campus in Greenville has all three buildings in the first phase of construction registered with the USGBC with the goal of securing a LEED silver certification."

The Midlands, meanwhile, are becoming a hot spot for sustainable residential construction, said Bin Wilcenski, chief operating officer of the Home Builders Association of Greater Columbia.

"There really is a lot going on... in fact, since August 2007, we've had 11 homes in the Columbia area receive green certification," he said.

While area builders began moving toward green construction prior to the economic slowdown as a reaction to market demand, Wilcenski said Columbia's unique attributes have helped sustain those efforts even while other parts of the country have seen a slowing of such activities.

But that's not to suggest other regions are not doing their part.


As of April, nearly 200 projects from all around the state were registered to be considered for LEED Certification, and efforts like the Charleston Green Committee and George Goes Green in Georgetown County were helping to raise awareness amongst residents and business owners alike.

While a desire to "do the right thing" or burnish the corporate image can both be said to be driving some of this activity, green construction and sustainable operational efforts also pay practical – and significant-dividends in lower utility costs, higher employee or student productivity, and better indoor air quality which leads to lower health care costs, fewer sick days, and more satisfied employees, according to green advocates.

SC Trend,
publishers of
Greater Columbia Business Monthly
and the
Greater Pee Dee/Grand Strand Business Journal

invite you to visit our new Web site, where you will find information with respect to advertising and editorial content.

www.sctrend.net



FIELDS
CONSTRUCTION CO

843-665-7548



"Carrier Transicold Mid-Atlantic"

1402 Meadors Farm Road
Post Office Box 12657
Florence, South Carolina 29504

Green pays for itself

Those who resist going green typically do so for a single reason: They've heard that implementing green policies or moving forward with a green construction project can be far more costly than the traditional approaches they've relied on in the past.

While Crozier concedes initial construction costs can be higher than those some businesses are accustomed to, this increased cost is minimal when compared to the cost of 25 years or more of operation.

"If you look at the building life cycle cost, sustainable design and construction, especially the energy and water saving features, it can off set the cost of increased initial construction in seven to 12 years," she said. "Many of the water saving features repay the improvement cost within one year."

And depending on the circumstance, going green may actually afford a business additional cost-savings benefits they may have overlooked. By way of example, Crozier pointed to green cleaning programs that reduce the cost of building maintenance through a reduction in cleaning manpower, supply and equipment purchases.

Even with a slow economy, businesses are still choosing to build green. Gregory offered a simple reason why the sustainability trend has been able to buck the market: "It's simply the right thing to do," he said.

In fact, he recalled, those were the very words said to him when he first broached the idea of calling attention to Milliken's green efforts and policies. The deliverer of

the phrase was none other than Roger Milliken himself.

"This was seven or eight years ago, and our way had always been to do what we do and to do it quietly," Gregory said. "The second thing Mr. Milliken said was, 'this is not a marketing platform. It's simply what we do.'"

Eventually, however, Milliken relented, so long as sustainability was promoted for sustainability's sake rather than purely for the company's sake, and so long as the concept was promoted to the right people — right, in Milliken's case primarily meaning the company's employees and its customers.

The concept was much in like with Wilcenski's thinking when he was asked about the importance of businesses in spreading the green message.

"We do like to see like-minded businesses come to our area as we believe that what people learn at work, they can apply to their personal lives and vice-versa. For example, if an employee sees his employer taking special measures to reduce their impact on the environment, it is very likely that the employee will take those values home with them," he said.

Gregory added that businesses adopt green or sustainable policies for a number of reasons.

"Cost reduction might be a factor, environmental conservation, social responsibility, and all of those have been a factor in this movement's growth in South Carolina," he said. "The important thing for everybody to remember though is that sustainability is a journey, not a destination."

Cox & Dinkins headquarters in Columbia

