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Developers cultivate a taste for green

Some projects are dazzling, others just work

The Business Journal of Portland - March 17, 2006 by [Wendy Culverwell](#) Business Journal staff writer

The 16-story [Center for Health and Healing](#) taking form at the South Waterfront casts a big shadow over Oregon's sustainable development community. But it's not so big that it overwhelms the landscape.

At 400,000 square feet and \$145.4 million, it is certainly one of the splashiest buildings to come down the pike and its green features just keep earning headlines. It boasts on-site sewage treatment and a pair of power plants that will help reduce its energy needs by more than 61 percent, compared with traditional buildings. It will capture rainwater to flush toilets and give off just a few hundred gallons of wastewater per day.

The building, at Oregon Health & Science University's South Waterfront campus, is on track to earn the U.S. Green Building Council's platinum level Leadership in Energy Efficiency and Design, or LEED, certification -- the highest level there is.

But when it comes to pushing the sustainability envelope, the OHSU building has plenty of company. From the Armory project in the Pearl District to the transformation of a former Best Buy store in Salem into a state office building, architects and designers and consultants say projects are breaking new ground in unheralded ways.

To date, about two dozen Oregon projects have won LEED certification and dozens more have registered with the council for consideration.

Jay Coalson, a principal at [Green Building Services](#), said his list of favorite projects includes the redevelopment of the former Portland Armory into a theater space for Portland Center Stage, and the 200 Market building, where owner John Russell has invested both time and money to make the downtown office building more efficient.

At the Armory, Coalson said, Gerding/Edlen Development Co. is uniting a historic preservation project with sustainable design. It is an enormous challenge, he said. Essentially, workers are building a new structure inside the Armory's castle-like walls.

Like the OHSU project, the Armory is gunning for LEED platinum status. It will be the first historic renovation project to achieve that level. Features include a rainwater collection system anchored by a 30,000-gallon cistern and an ambitious energy efficiency program that includes natural ventilation, under-floor air distribution and operable skylights. It will use 45 percent less power than a comparable building developed to current codes, the designers say.

The Armory is "Exhibit A" in the push to preserve urban history while addressing long-term environmental impacts, such as energy and water use and incorporating recycled building materials, Coalson said.

The 200 Market building is a different kind of project. It is expected to receive a LEED certification for existing buildings. That's a new classification, created about 18 months ago to honor landlords

for taking steps to make existing buildings more environmentally friendly. Nike Inc. recently received similar honors for its Ken Griffey Junior building.

Coalson, who worked on the 200 Market LEED application, said 200 Market differs from Nike in a major way -- Russell has to balance the needs of dozens of tenants, each in turn governed by its own lease. Nike on the other hand exerts greater control over its building and its employee-occupants.

Russell bought the asbestos-laden building from Prudential in 1988 and basically stripped it down to its structural supports. He has invested hundreds of thousands of dollars on the building's mechanical systems, pumps, motors and other systems. When tenants update their space, he requires them to install motion detectors in offices that turn lights off when occupants leave.

In 1990, he replaced a concrete patio extending over one of the ground-floor offices with a grass-covered sport court -- possibly Portland's first green roof.

"We didn't know to call it an eco-roof," he said.

Why go to the trouble of applying for a LEED award? Simple, Russell said. He wanted his people to get recognition for the innovative things they had done to promote recycling and car-sharing. And he isn't sitting on his laurels.

"I'd love to see a solar roof on this building," he mused.

Mike Shea, an associate specializing in sustainability issues at Fletcher Farr Ayotte PC, said projects don't necessarily have to break technological ground to be groundbreaking.

The new Vancouver Hilton and Convention Center, which opened last summer, is a great example. The \$73 million facility qualified for the basic LEED certification. There is nothing particularly innovative about the technology and the project was completed at almost no additional cost. But, Shea said, it was among the Hilton chain's first forays into sustainable development and it changed the company's views about green building practices.

"That's innovative," he said.

Equally important, guests won't necessarily see the hotel's green features. It was designed with polished finishes -- none of the concrete floors and raw timbers that typically broadcast a green building's pedigree.

That's important to organizations that want to be green but want fit and polish also.

"You can be sustainable and have a classic appeal," Shea said.

Oregon State University's Kelly Engineering Building and the Willis Business School projects are both good examples of green buildings that don't scream "green," he said.

Another favorite is the former Best Buy store that was transformed into an office for the state Department of Human Services. The project used day-lighting and under-floor air systems that combined to give workers access to both daylight and personal temperature controls. The project wasn't submitted for a LEED rating, but it was a winner nonetheless.

Employee productivity went up when the office opened two years ago, Shea said.

Another favorite project -- the Hood River County Library -- shows off the value of taking advantage of a great location. Summer winds flowing through the Columbia River Gorge cool and ventilate the building, eliminating the need for air conditioning. Four years after it opened, the library remains a cutting-edge example of marrying technology with natural assets, Shea said.

Michael O'Brien, green building specialist in the city of Portland's Office of Sustainable Development, said he's intrigued by the smaller projects that proceed without much public notice.

Ode to Roses is a two-story, 5,500-square-foot mixed-use project on Northeast Fremont Street. It is on track to earn a LEED silver-level rating, the third-highest rating available for new construction, after platinum and gold.

Beth and Kevin Cavanaugh bought the site of the former Rose's Famous 24 Flavors ice cream shop to prevent the neighborhood site from becoming a convenience store. Kevin enlisted his then-colleagues at Fletcher Farr Ayotte to develop a mixed-use building with a restaurant and the Ten Pod office cooperative.

"The building has really created an economic opportunity for those little startup companies," O'Brien said. Dale Farr and Mike Shea of Fletcher Farr Ayotte were the architect and LEED consultant, respectively, for Ode to Roses, with an assist from Interface Engineers on the CO2 ventilation system.

Cavanaugh calls Ode to Roses an "accidental LEED" project because the design was done before the Green Building Council rolled out the LEED program.

O'Brien said the new warehouse at the Rebuilding Center is another project worthy of note. For visitors, it exemplifies the new Portland style of building, with a heavy emphasis on salvaged materials.

"The switch to re-use is a really interesting turn of events," he said.

He agreed with Coalson that the Armory is another interesting project -- in part because it will pointedly highlight the difference between the old-fashioned high-gloss finish of the current Center Stage facility and the new-fangled emphasis on reusing old materials of its new digs.

"I think you're going to have quite a different experience when you walk into the Armory. It's a used building made with used materials," O'Brien said.

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