

The architecture of health

Oregon is way ahead on green building, but we need to keep pushing forward

Portland was pushing for green buildings when people elsewhere were scoffing at the idea. Before the light bulb went off, in some cases literally, and more Americans realized that energy-efficient buildings save both energy and money.

It dawned on Portland long before it dawned on business that capitalizing on the green building trend is a triple win. By going greener, businesses can reduce costs, boost their reputations and improve the world, not to mention feel better looking at themselves in the mirror every day.

What's not to like?

Now everyone is rushing to catch up. Green building is moving swiftly into the mainstream. If this is wonderful news for the planet, and it is — an estimated 30 percent to 40 percent of the energy we consume goes to heat, cool and operate buildings — it is challenging news for Oregonians.

This is exactly the moment when we tend to blow it. We specialize in sinking into reveries of self-congratulation, stalling progress right when we ought to be seizing our advantage.

True, the recognition showered on Portland this week alone would be enough to turn anyone's head. The U.S. Green Building Council, the national leader in certifying green design, just awarded its top most platinum certification to Oregon Health



OHSU's new Center for Health & Healing in the South Waterfront.

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The OHSU center is the first large medical and research building in the country to achieve the platinum rank, and one of only 30 buildings to win it. The center is 61 percent more energy-efficient than Oregon codes require and also uses far less water. The center has the wonderful "feel" of a green building, too.

Although data on this are only preliminary, people are starting to notice that green buildings, typically saturated with fresh air and daylight, make people feel better. They may make patients heal more quickly, students work harder and workers

more productive, too. There are even indications that customers linger longer in green buildings, something businesses are eager to seize on.

Bank of America, for instance, recently pledged \$1.4 billion to achieving LEED certification (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) in all its new construction and banking centers, including a skyscraper that the company is planning in New York City.

This week, the U.S. Green Building Council also presented a special "leadership in sustainability" award to the Portland-based Gerding Edlen Development Co., which managed the design and construction of

the OHSU center. The award was for helping to transform the national market and, let's just say it, change the world.

Counting the OHSU center, Gerding Edlen has 33 projects either environmentally certified already or moving toward certification. That's an astonishing number, the highest any private developer in the nation can boast. Yet Gerding Edlen will tell you there's no time to waste boasting.

We were green early, yes, but this is not the moment to dwell on Portland's advantage. Instead, it's the moment to capitalize on it.

Why be green when you can be greenest?