

# **GROWING TREND: GREEN BUILDINGS' POPULARITY BLOSSOMING IN CENTRAL FLORIDA**

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A budding development is taking root in Central Florida -- a move toward "green building," or creating structures designed to conserve energy and preserve the environment.

Currently, there are three Central Florida green buildings and at least two more green projects on the drawing board for Orlando.

"Going green is an exponentially growing trend," says Mike Hess, managing member of Greentime, an Orlando-based environmental consultancy. "We are working with more than a dozen projects state-wide, with several others pending."

## **'Perfect storm' of factors**

Propelling the growth of green buildings is a "perfect storm" of factors, including greater environmental awareness and government tax incentives.

Energy consumption is another factor behind the green movement. Consider: Commercial buildings consume about 40 percent of the energy used in the nation -- more than cars or manufacturing plants -- according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

The typical green project produces energy savings that range from 40 cents-50 cents per square foot each year, says Hess. And on the residential side, the savings for homeowners who have gone green can be as much as half of their home energy bill, if not more.

The rising cost of construction materials also has encouraged builders to go green. "Building green is becoming almost as economical as traditional construction methods, especially with the skyrocketing costs of such materials as concrete and steel," says Roy O. Bonnell Jr., executive director of the Florida Green Building Coalition, a Naples-based nonprofit group.

Some of the latest green building materials include energy-efficient foam insulation, windows and doors, heating and air-conditioning units, solar lighting resources, pre-constructed wall systems and landscaping processes such as green roofing. In general, green materials have a high recycled content, can be reused or recycled, are made locally, are less toxic and are rapidly renewable, says Kyle Abney, head of pre-construction services for Hoar Construction and a founding member of the Central Florida chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council, which represents the building industry.

## **Planning early is key**

The key to a successful green project is to involve all parties from the start, including architects, builders and landscape professionals, Bonnell says. That's because the cost efficiencies generally come with building them into the design process instead of waiting until the construction phase, when the advantages are limited, he says.

To keep everyone on the same page, the coalition is creating statewide green building standards for houses, community developments, commercial buildings and government agencies. With its guidance, local standards for state municipalities were adopted earlier this year.

"Orlando is not as green as it needs to be, but it is making some headway," says Bonnell. "Communities such as Harmony, Baldwin Park and Celebration are making strides toward it."

## **Verdant ventures**

One of the most prominent green buildings locally is the Student Union expansion at the University of Central Florida, the first university in the state to install a green roof. Green roofs use waterproofing and drainage systems that allow a layer of vegetation to grow on flat roofs, increasing air quality, reducing energy transfer and decreasing stormwater pollutants.

UCF's 1,600-square-foot roof, installed in May, is expected to cut the expansion's energy costs by about half and to more than double the life of the roof from 20 to 50 years. The school also plans to construct green roofs on a library expansion, band building and athletic facility, contingent upon receiving state funding grants.

The school's initial cost of going green is about \$20 to \$25 per square foot of roof area more than using traditional construction methods, but the payback period is less than 10 years, with energy savings being the most direct benefit, says Marty Wanielista, director of the UCF Stormwater Management Academy.

Another local example of a green project is the Nature Conservancy Building located in the Poinciana area. That facility, built in 1992, has solar-powered electricity. "In my opinion, it's the greenest building in the state," says Abney.

In addition, the Eugene M. and Christine Lynn Business Center at Stetson University in DeLand is the first building in the state to be certified as a green building. There's also a residential high-rise building on the drawing board for downtown Orlando that will be green, as well as a new 23,000-square-foot "green" classroom building planned for Colonial High School's Ninth Grade Center, says Hess.

### **Finding gold in green**

Another firm that has seen the benefits of going green is property management group Taurus Southern Investments LLC. Taurus is modifying its traditional building design to meet green standards.

"The intent is to reduce the negative impact of buildings on the environment and occupants," says Albert Livingston, director of development for Taurus.

"Many items designed into green buildings will be commonplace within the next decade, and starting to design this way today will give us a competitive advantage in the future."

*Associate Managing Editor Susan Lundine contributed to this report.*