

'Green' designs gain momentum in Idaho

Architects, contractors find value in environmentally friendly projects

By Ken Miller

SPECIAL TO THE IBR

It's taken a while, but Idaho is gradually catching the "green construction" wave, with architects and builders incorporating more environmentally friendly designs into their buildings, industry leaders say.

"What we're trying to do is not just get government entities to bite off on this, but get the private sector to accept it as well," said Bruce Poe of Cole + Poe Architects, one of the leaders in Idaho in the movement toward more environmentally friendly building design and construction.

"The only way to do that is to show them that this can be done. It does increase the bottom line for making profits, and for creating a more efficient and sustainable building. The human side is that you're creating a better environment for the people."

Green building has been catching on in markets across the country, but for a number of reasons the trend has been slower to take root in Idaho. Industry analysts say that's changing as building owners realize the long-term cost savings and marketability of environmentally friendly buildings.

Adding to the momentum beyond lower power bills are studies showing workplace absenteeism and even student academic performance improve in naturally lit, well-ventilated workplaces and classrooms.

"Whether you do it because you consider yourself an environmentalist or whatever or you do it because of your business, it helps the bottom line," Poe said.

Trends toward green building – from natural lighting to efficient heating, air conditioning and plumbing systems, and the use of environmentally friendly materials – have captured the interest of building owners who realize the benefits can outweigh short-term hurdles.

Kevin Van Den Wymelenberg, director of the new Boise-based Integrated Design Lab that helps building designers and owners figure out how to take advantage of such things as natural lighting and air flow, said added costs are just part of the reluctance to embrace green building.

"In terms of roadblocks, I would say it's 50-50 between money and awareness," Van Den Wymelenberg said. "There are lots of smaller issues, but any project is going to hit a roadblock at some point. The earlier you can get involved in a project, the better."

The IDL, which opened in October, was created by BetterBricks, a nonprofit initiative of the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance, along with the University of Idaho, Idaho Power Co., and the Idaho Department of Water Resources Energy Division.

Van Den Wymelenberg said the IDL is quickly becoming a player in Idaho's green building movement, thanks to broad sup-



KEN MILLER

Petra Inc., Boise, is renovating this 16,000-square-foot warehouse on Front St., between Fifth and Sixth streets in Boise. Co-owner Steve Laney, above, of Oaas Laney LLC, said he expects the structure to become the state's first LEED-certified building.

port from the state, BetterBricks, Idaho Power and other promoters.

"They're getting it," he said. "The architects want to do these things. The school districts want to do these things."

The IDL worked with Cole + Poe Architects to incorporate green design elements into the Tumble Time Gymnastics building near completion on Fairview Avenue in Boise. It's also working with CSHQA Architects on a new Nampa high school and on the new recreation center at the College of Southern Idaho.

Steve Laney, who with partner Erik Oaas owns Oaas Laney

See GREEN, page 2

'Green' building catches on with Idaho architects, contractors

Continued from page 1

Commercial Development, said his firm decided to pursue LEED certification for its warehouse renovation project on Front Street in Boise in part because it makes good business sense.

Oaas Laney is working with Cole + Poe Architects and contractor Petra Inc. to convert the historic building into what Laney believes will be Idaho's first LEED-certified building. It's scheduled to open in mid-December and is now full with tenants eager to move into their new, greener offices.

"The architects looked at the project and said that for a little bit more money, we could make the building LEED-certified," Laney said. "We looked at the value and the value it added for the tenants and it quickly became an easy decision to make."

While "there were some added costs," Laney said they were worthwhile.

"Eventually, it will be cheaper to do a LEED-certified building," he said. "It definitely pays off in the long run."

"The thought is that eventually there will be a cross-over where it's more cost-effective to do a LEED-certified building than to not do it," he said.

"I don't think people fully appreciate the benefit or value until they get into the building," Laney said. "There's no question it's going to be demanded of building owners. We feel that in looking at it, any time there's an opportunity to go this way, we will."

Sue Seifert at the Idaho Division of Energy agreed with Van Den Wymenlenberg that cost and awareness are the two main obstacles, but said they're slowly being overcome.

"We're working on it," Seifert said. "As far as the schools go, we're trying to educate as much as we can to the school districts and also the architects."

"Every time I hear of a school district even thinking of going out for a bond, that is when we have to meet with them," she said, to better educate school officials about the wisdom of going green.

"I think it'll catch on," Seifert said. "I think it's just a matter of the money and awareness. You've got to put a little more money into it to build it high-performance."

Incorporating green construction can mean slightly higher architectural and design costs. Many construction materials are more expensive as well.

Poe said green building can mean additional design and engineering costs and documentation, "and some of the more efficient heating and cooling equipment may cost slightly more, but they're running at such a higher efficiency the payback is much more than a typical unit."

As more architects and engineers learn about green design, they're able to reduce those added costs, Poe said.

"It depends on the experience of the design team and how intelligently you put the project together," he said.

Poe is helping to organize an Idaho chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council, the national trade organization representing all segments of the construction industry. The USGBC established the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program (LEED), which helps developers weave green building technologies into their projects and which sets standards for green build-

ing certification.

Poe said meeting the highest LEED standards often means higher costs.

"The cost involved is really dependent on what level of certification you are trying to achieve," he said.

Poe said the group working to create the local USGBC chapter expects to receive "provisional chapter" approval in the next three months, followed eventually by full chapter status.

"People are getting impatient with trying to move us forward," Poe said. Poe was Idaho's first LEED-certified architect and was recently named to a two-year term on the USGBC's national steering committee.

Poe said Boise Mayor Dave Bieter has been instrumental in promoting green building, including committing the city to implement many LEED standards in its new construction projects.

"I would say yes, definitely, we're making inroads," Poe said. "There are a lot of things going on out there. The thing the USGBC understands is that you've got to make a business case for this, and Boise is making some big progress from my perspective in getting these businesses and corporations on line."

USGBC President and CEO Rick Fedrizzi, who has attended green building conferences in Boise and who is helping create the Idaho chapter, said Idaho is quickly catching up to other states in adopting green construction.

"What Idaho is doing now, they're probably picking this up in the mainstream," Fedrizzi said. "You're not behind the curve, you're probably where you need to be."

Fedrizzi said membership in the USGBC has jumped significantly in the past few years, adding 150 new member companies a month.

"It's mind-boggling," he said of the organization's growth. "From a business perspective, there's a net benefit for the environment. What we've found is that these buildings are such strong

performers, that marketing of these projects is extremely easy. Anyone who has been in a green building knows you feel better in them."

Fedrizzi cited studies showing 20 percent of students in green classrooms scoring higher in their test scores, and patients in green hospital rooms being discharged an average of 2.5 days earlier than those in other hospitals.

"And in retail, people shopping in green retail spaces are purchasing more," he said.

"The marketplace is sitting up and taking notice," Fedrizzi said. "They're noticing that in big markets, you can get more per square footage in lease and rental and it affects the value of your property 10 percent or more. There are so many benefits."

While building a LEED-certified project adds an average of 2 percent to the cost, depending on how many standards are met, Fedrizzi said building owners are more willing to pay the difference.

"It's happening, it's there, and people are understanding it," he said.

©2004 Idaho Business Review. All rights reserved. Originally published in the Idaho Construction Review, a publication of the Idaho Business Review, November 15, 2004.



"I think it'll catch on. I think it's just a matter of the money and awareness."

— Sue Seifert