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GREENBOOK

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Abney Leading The Way For The USGBC In South Florida

Continually crisscrossing the State of Florida keeps Kyle Abney of Abney + Abney Green Solutions very busy. He travels statewide providing counsel to clients, government agencies as well as consumers.

But that's only half of his story. Abney is also the chief ambassador and spokesperson for the U.S. Green Building Council's South Florida Chapter. These two roles keep him going 24/7.

"When it comes to educating folks about green-building and sustainability, I can't say no," says Kyle, a 1999 graduate of the University of Florida with a Bachelor's Degree in Architectural Design. "The USGBC's mission of transforming the way buildings and communities are designed, built and operated is critically important to our State and the entire USA. This is definitely the right thing to do -- embracing a proven strategy and a path that will create an environmentally and socially responsible, healthy and prosperous environment that will improve the quality of life for future generations."

An independent arm of the USGBC, the South Florida Chapter is a nonprofit organization headquartered in Lake Worth. The Chapter's geographic reach is from Sebastian in the Treasure Coast down through the Keys. There are monthly meetings at three local branches, the Broward, Miami-Dade and the Keys Branch. The Treasure Coast and Palm Beach Branches are where the rubber hits the road with educational events, tours of green buildings, public programs with topics related to green building, workshops and study sessions, industry networking, legislative advocacy and more.

"Our programs and activities are designed to educate, enlighten and empower our region to adopt an approach to building that is both ecologically and economically sustainable," says Kyle. "We also have a lot of fun in building this special camaraderie of like-minded individuals."

Kyle became the first person in the USA to receive a formal construction degree



Kyle Abney

in green building when he earned his Masters Degree in Building Construction with a concentration in Sustainable Construction in 2001 from the Rinker School at UF. Involvement in green-building organizations got in his blood early.

While at UF, Kyle was the founding President of the first student chapter of the USGBC. He later served as a founding Board member of the USGBC's Central Florida Chapter and the Florida/Caribbean Regional Council, and is the founding Chair of the Treasure Coast and Palm Beach Branch of USGBC South Florida Chapter. Kyle also sits on the Florida Green Building Coalition's Board, and is a founding steering committee member of the Treasure Coast Builders Association, as well as, the Gold Coast Builders Association's Green Building Councils.

"The volunteer work I do is tremendously fulfilling," says Kyle. "The quality of individuals behind this movement is only matched by the importance of transform-



USGBC South Florida
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ing the built environment in South Florida. One day, thanks to these initiatives, sustainable communities will be the norm."

To learn more about the U.S. Green Building Council South Florida Chapter, visit the organization's website at www.usgbcsof.org or email their Executive Director, Lee Cooke, at lcooke@usgbcsof.org.

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Purchasing and Renovating LEED® Certified Real Estate: Is it worth it?

The U.S. economic downturn of late 2008 has cleverly been coined "The Great Recession." In a response similar to FDR's New Deal of the 1930s, a massive amount of government money has been injected into our economy as a hopeful antidote to our weakened economy.

However, this time around, a new buzzword circulates around the billions in emergency dispersals: "green." Optimistic statistics about green collar jobs, the green market sector, greening the economy, and the emergence of green buildings splash across newspapers and online media outlets.

But what is a green building? And is a green building really worth pursuing, from a purely business point of view?

In a sense, environmental sustainability with respect to construction is a subjective issue. And the impact that humans have had on the planet since the Industrial Revolution is certainly not a new topic of discussion. However, in an attempt to objectively quantify the healthfulness and energy/water performance of a given structure, a number of green building rating systems have quickly developed, beginning as recently as the early 1990s. The UK has put together the BRE



Johnny Epstein

Environmental Assessment Method; Australia and South Africa have Energy Star, Spain has VERDE, China has GBAS, and the United States has LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). How does LEED impact the typical American real estate investor? First of all, it's important to get a feel for the prevalence of LEED usage. Currently, it is estimated that 6% of all new commercial construction ventures in the U.S. are achieving LEED NC (New Construction) Certification. LEED Core & Shell certifications approach 0.5% of all new shell structures, and LEED Operations & Maintenance: Existing Buildings, a bit less. Those numbers seem trivial when viewed without a context, but the broader trend is unmistakable. In 2008, the overall number of projects registering for LEED certification doubled the cumulative total registering from 2001-2007. And in particular, C&S registrations grew

13-fold from 2006 to 2007, and, most impressively, O&M projects increased 20-fold during that same timeframe.¹

Notice that O&M certifications are the currently the least popular of the LEED building certifications, however, they are very rapidly playing catch-up. Common sense tells us that there are a lot more existing buildings in the real estate market than brand new ones, so this means there are millions and millions of square feet of space out there that haven't yet been O&M certified, and clearly, people are catching on quickly. So this is a rush, nearly a stampede, that's worth tracking closely.

Certainly, any sensible investor should make his or her own rational judgments, and not just play follow-the-leader, especially when considering the acquisition of a multi-million dollar building loaded with unknowns and hidden problem spots.

What are some of the tangible benefits and drawbacks of purchasing a LEED certified building, or renovating a non-LEED building and subsequently attempting LEED-O&M certification?

Drawbacks of LEED:

Commissioning (required as a prereq-

uisite for all LEED projects) costs may approach \$2 per square foot

A project team inexperienced with LEED may stumble and add to a renovation cost

Certification fees average about \$2,000 per building, depending on the floor area

Designers, builders, and subcontractors involved with a renovation may have to expand beyond their comfort zones, unless they are familiar and on-board with LEED

Benefits of LEED

- 8-9% decrease in operating costs can be expected² (especially pertinent to institutional owners)
- 7.5% increase in building values²
- 6.6% improvement on return on investment²
- 3.5% increase in occupancy rates²
- 3% rent increase²
- Name recognition for improved marketing
- Tax breaks and expedited building permits

LEED O&M certification is an important option for any prospective real estate investor to consider carefully. But to even be eligible, the existing building must be at least two years old, and have been occupied for at least 12 months.

Sustainability For The Gulf Coast

Sustainability should not be so much of a checklist for new buildings but rather a process of mutual exploration between design firm and client. In Florida and along the Gulf Coast, building owners must also factor in hurricane code requirements. These two considerations are easily achieved when the necessary planning is done up front.

Many clients want their projects to be sustainable to some degree. Owners want to have employees who are comfortable and productive in a building with increased efficiency. At the same time, they need someone with a balance sheet overseeing the design and



Christian Sheridan, AIA, LEED® AP

has helped us re-evaluate how we make the case for "green" and the pro-

cess of achieving sustainable opportunities with a project. Utilizing LEED® principles is a good place to start considering a project in holistic environmental terms. A building can be sustainable without being LEED® certified, though there are definitely added benefits for projects with certification. Some commercial building owners report higher lease rates and improved employee performance while others use LEED® certification as a marketing tool, demonstrating their environmental commitment.

Before the first line of the new building is even drawn, everyone involved should take a common sense approach to sustainability. Such considerations as how the building is oriented on the site to take advantage of prevailing winds and sun angles typically incur no extra cost but can substantially impact energy consumption. Designers must determine how to work within the parameters of the environmental forces acting upon a site, rather than forcing a building upon it. The Gulf Coast has unique forces to consider with specific regard to sun and wind.

With an average of 72% days of sunshine, owners should consider the sun their energy ally. Simple shading strategies, whether from a permanent exterior shade structure, manual interior shades, or integrated within the glass, should be addressed early on. Optimal site place-

ment and a good shading strategy can allow for substantial energy savings while still providing plenty of interior day lighting.

Florida has more stringent code requirements than anywhere in the country in response to the threat of wind damage. Currently, there is a growing availability of code-compliant, sustainable building materials, increasing the palette options when designing an environmentally responsible building.

Occasionally, when taking advantage of 'no cost' sustainability options, the site plan and building space layout end up different than the client's expectations. This is an ideal opportunity to discuss sustainability. Concepts such as natural ventilation, rainwater collection and native site vegetations can be incorporated into the design for maximum environmental benefit, but they should be given consideration at the project's outset and in relation to the client's programming needs.

Additionally, architects appreciate clients who think big in their approach to sustainability - whether for LEED recognition or for the bottom line. The design team and consultants work with this enthusiasm to implement a realistic plan to achieve their goals.

Christian Sheridan, AIA, LEED® AP is a project manager for BRAVE/Architecture in Houston, Texas. The firm provides planning, design, interiors, landscape, project management, graphic design, and product design services primarily for cultural, community, and education facilities. Christian co-teaches architectural design at the University of Houston's Gerald D. Hines School of Architecture with firm founder Fernando Brave. Both approach teaching sustainability the same way they incorporate it into their built professional work - to encourage the next generation of designers to green new buildings as a matter of course rather than requirement. Current projects include The Sicardi Gallery, where the client requested BRAVE/Architecture to design a LEED® certified art gallery in Houston's Museum District.



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