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## News

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# On Earth Day, a local push for green building

## On Earth Day, a look at the local push for green building

By Lee Shearer | lee.shearer@onlineathens.com | Story updated at 12:21 am on 4/22/2009

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Architectural designer Lori Bork describes the Hotel Indigo under construction north of downtown as a "gold star" for Athens because of the principles of sustainability, efficiency and other "green" features incorporated in the building.

J.M. Wilkerson Construction and Rialto Property Partners hope to win a designation called "LEED gold" for the hotel - a hard-to get accolade awarded by the U.S. Green Building Council based on a scoring system that gives points for features like energy conservation, buying locally and using healthy materials.

The council developed the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) system to rate buildings that use sustainable building methods.

More and more buildings that meet LEED standards are sprouting up in Athens as citizens observe Earth Day today.

The University of Georgia has been going green for several years; new buildings have cisterns to gather rainwater or condensed water for reuse, and high-efficiency cooling and heating systems. UGA planners also are buying more locally, to cut down the distances materials have to be hauled, said Campus Architect Danny Sniff.

Not far from Hotel Indigo, Athens' Armentrout Roebuck Matheny Consulting Group is working for the Athens-Clarke government to remodel the Athens First Bank & Trust building into a customer service building for the county public utilities department.

The service center will meet LEED standards and be about 8 percent more energy efficient than a standard office building, said architect James Blythe of Armentrout Roebuck Matheny.

Such energy efficiencies and other aspects of

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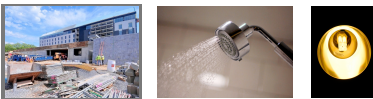
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J.M. Wilkerson Construction builders work Tuesday on Hotel Indigo in downtown Athens.

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## EARTH DAY

Anyone interested in learning how to live green will find plenty of opportunity at Earth Day activities today.

► **4EverGreen Earth Day Expo**, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Athens Technical College.

► **It's So Easy Being Green**, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., University of Georgia Tate Plaza.

► **Earth Day 2009 Celebration**, 5:30-7:30 p.m., State Botanical Garden of Georgia.

building green will become routine in Athens, where the county government will apply LEED standards to all new buildings in the future - and more big builders will follow suit, Blythe said.

"What we call LEED now is going to be in 10 years standard practice," he said.

Groups that set standards for buildings, like the American Institute of Engineers, are beginning to incorporate green features like energy efficiency into their standards, he said.

Bork believes big institutional construction is leading the way, but home building in Athens is lagging. Still, a growing number of builders and real estate groups are pushing green techniques, such as J.W. York Homes, Full Circle Real Estate Group and Red Clay Natural Builders.

"I think we probably have a long way to go. It's a process of changing the way you do things," agreed Tony Purcell, owner of Complete Resources Building and Repair.

But building green will get easier and less expensive, Purcell said.

Although building green often is more expensive, it saves money in the long run - houses last longer and use less energy, he said.

And as more people demand green products, the price will come down, Purcell said.

Sniff has seen prices fall for green products and systems - building materials with recycled contents, paints that don't give off harmful fumes, and high-efficiency heating and cooling systems.

A few years ago, green products might cost 15 percent more than normal products; today, the difference is closer to 1 percent or 2 percent, he said.

"We're seeing the very, very beginning of green building. It's probably lagging behind other parts of the country, but it's starting," Bork said.




Education will drive the changes as much as lowered costs for green products and systems, she said.

"Typically, with green building, there are some up-front costs, but some things you can do for almost no cost, like positioning the house for maximum natural lighting," Bork said.

Such simple steps once were a routine feature of construction, but in modern times of cheap energy, those easy efficiencies have been forgotten, she said.

"Houses have gotten dumber instead of smarter over time," Bork said.

Originally published in the Athens Banner-Herald on Wednesday, April 22, 2009

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## Reader Comments

Posted by: [dickfield](#) at Apr. 22, 2009 at 7:55:59 am

It should be noted that the Athens-Clarke County Unified Government has had a policy to build sustainably for nearly five years. In that time it has built four LEED Certified buildings and has nearly 10 more in various stages of LEED approval, construction, or design. ACC is pleased to see other sectors following its lead (no pun intended) in creating more sustainable structures for its employees, customers and visitors to our community. For more information on ACC's green building, contact Dick Field, ACC Environmental Coordinator at 706/613-3530.

Posted by: [HowardRoark](#) at Apr. 22, 2009 at 8:48:24 am

I wonder if they will recycle all of the auto glass that will be on the floor of the parking deck courtesy of the neighbors at Bethel. That would be very LEED of them.

Posted by: [loribork](#) at Apr. 22, 2009 at 1:30:15 pm

Closing with my quote about houses getting "dumber" sounds pretty harsh. I just wanted to let everyone know that I am optimistic that trends are changing. LEED, Earthcraft, and educated builders, designers, and customers are

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helping to make residential design "smart" once again. With age old concepts like passive solar design and good natural ventilation being combined with the technology and products available today, houses are going to be better than ever! It's what everyone should demand. I've helped low-income housing build to Earthcraft standards, and if they can do it, anyone can. It isn't a cost issue its just a quality and responsibility one.

Posted by: [stpaisleyblue](#) at Apr. 22, 2009 at 1:55:11 pm

I commend ACC for being environmentally responsible and building green. It's a little too late, but better than never. David Matheny, you better not mess up the architectural integrity of the old Athens Federal Bank building! One of my relatives will be turning over in his grave, if you do;

Posted by: [ronburgundy](#) at Apr. 22, 2009 at 7:02:08 pm

I doubt this hotel will look attractive if painted green.

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