



Green *from the Ground Up*

By Casey L. Penn

Fort Smith Clinic Leads the Way in Green Arkansas Practices

These days, being green – or at least appearing to – is as trendy as loft apartments, designer jeans and celebrity weddings. But long before green was cool, two Arkansas dermatologists were already devoted to the practice.

Drs. Brad and Sandy Johnson of Johnson Dermatology in Fort Smith have lived “green” for many years. A couple in marriage as well as business, the two are passionate about respecting the earth – and their local community – by embracing earth-friendly practices and a healthy way of life. “Brad was a physics major and he taught me to be green,” said Dr. Sandy. “He leads us at home and in business in living green.”

At home, the two opt for reusable plastic bags when shopping, use solar panels to generate energy and take advantage of drought-resistant landscaping and energy-rated windows for natural lighting.

In business, the couple owns what they believe will be the state’s first LEED-Certified Clinic. Their facility was built using green building techniques that they anticipate will earn them Silver LEED recognition by the U.S. Green Building Council.

To meet the certification requirements involved in LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design), the clinic has worked with Viridian, a green building consultant firm based in Little Rock. The firm provided LEED consulting, energy modeling and commissioning services on the project. In laymen’s terms, the firm helped the clinic understand the measures that would lead to conserved energy and more sustainable construction techniques. It also handled verification of proper installation and function of mechanical and lighting systems of the building.

Matt Bell, partner at Viridian, shared some of what the Johnson clinic achieved through LEED design and construction. The list is long and includes these noteworthy measures:

- ✓ reduced water consumption by choosing low flow fixtures and water efficient toilets

- ✓ eliminated potable water use for irrigation through a combination of drought tolerant plant species and a rain water harvesting system that captures the rain water from the roof
- ✓ reduced estimated energy use by 25 % through a combination of energy efficient lighting, HVAC systems, and efficient building envelope
- ✓ diversion of 68 % of construction waste in landfills through recycling of materials
- ✓ 16 % of construction materials consisted of recycled content
- ✓ 36 % of construction materials were sourced from regional suppliers (within 500 miles)
- ✓ reduced indoor air quality contamination due to the use of non toxic materials (Low VOC paints, Low VOC adhesives, Low VOC carpet and flooring, and wood products that do not contain formaldehyde)

Giving up Green to Go Green

In recent years, many physicians have left the Fort Smith community;

meanwhile, the Johnsons have made a sizeable commitment to establishing a permanent presence for their patients. It wasn't easy to complete the many steps involved in trying to attain LEED certification. It wasn't cheap. Building "green" has cost roughly \$40,000 more than a typical building, according to Dr. Sandy.

Still, giving up a little green has led to its own rewards. Dr. Sandy indicated that the example she is setting is, in and of itself, part of her payback. "As physicians, we are leaders in the community," she said. "We chose to go green because it is something we believe in, but we also want to express to our patients that we care about them.

"Building green costs money. It shows our patients and community that we care enough to invest in them. All of our materials came locally so the extra expense also helped to stimulate our local economy—something that benefits all of us."

In addition to the clinic's reassuring presence in the area, its pending LEED status will result in improved efficiency and, ultimately, a return on investment for the clinic. In addition to the environmental and health-related benefits of the project, LEED certified buildings cost less to operate and maintain over



The exterior barn motif of the building complements the neighborhood of Riley Farms. A silo collects rain water that is used for flushing the toilets.

time, are more energy and water efficient and contribute to occupant health and productivity (www.usgbc.org). Bell noted that approximately 20,000 gallons of water would be saved annually with this building on just the indoor fixtures.

"We expect to recoup money by improved work efficiency, happier employees, energy efficiency and a healthier work environment," said Dr. Sandy. Staff reaction has been positive, as has

that of patients. Rebecca Dunn, PA-C, said that patients often commend the clinic for being green. "I enjoy seeing them smile when I tell them that the floor is made from recycled PVC pipe," said Dunn.

Crystal Marrazzo, CST, finds it refreshing how the clinic's green design incorporates natural light through large windows. Lynne McCartney, billing manager, has noticed that the climate control is better in the new clinic, too. "Employees in each "territory" can adjust the temperature to their individual taste without affecting the comfort level of the rest," she said, adding that she is proud to work with employers who are conscious both of the environment and of the well-being of their employees and patients. "It makes for a healthier environment both physically and mentally."

Shades of Green

If your clinic desires to be greener, there are ways to make it happen. Starting points, according to Dr. Sandy, would include simple things like recycling cans and plastic bottles, using cloth gowns, being as electronic as possible (i.e., electronic medical records, only using paper when necessary) and turning off or lowering lights.



The lounge area for Johnson Dermatology team members includes ample seating, amenities like changing rooms, a fridge and microwave, and plenty of natural lighting.

Going a step further would mean using nondisposables as much as possible. A good example would be sharps, or needles. Most clinics deal with these, and most have containers for needles that must be disposed of. They sit in boxes until they are picked up for a fee. "They're wasteful and can smell bad," said Dr. Sandy, who put her clinical manager, Shelly Sparrow, in charge of finding a better way.

"Shelly found smaller, silver bins that then go into a Demolizer, where they are melted down and processed on site," said Dr. Sandy. The Demolizer (available online) allows clinics to process their biomedical sharps and red bag waste on-site. Waste is made sterile and the processed collector can be tossed into the trash. "Without pick-up fees, our clinic made up the cost pretty quickly."

Clinics looking to follow the Johnsons in their quest for LEED Certification for new or existing construction may start searching for information online at www.usgbc.org before seeking the services of a green architectural firm or a green consulting firm such as Viridian. Virid-



Team members have their own parking area, access cards to allow them into the building and an outdoor eating area that faces a natural setting.

ian pointed out, too, that the USGBC just released its LEED for Healthcare rating system recently. "We have not had much interest yet, but the USGBC is seeing quite a bit of interest nationally since they developed a specific rating system to address this sector," said Bell.

More information is available online regarding LEED Certified and the specific differences in rating systems. For more information about Johnson Dermatology Clinic and its green design, visit www.johnsondermatology.com or call Dr. Sandy at (479) 649-DERM. AMS

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