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Green building breaks ground in Rhode Island

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The green building ethic-energy efficiency, reduction in water use, cleaner indoor air, and the use of recycled and sustainable materials-has taken hold in Rhode Island. High energy prices, a federal stimulus plan focused on green technology, infrastructure and jobs, and growing consumer interest in sustainable living-all are prompting residents, businesses and governments to change the ways they design and construct buildings, neighborhoods and cities.

The Rhode Island Green Building Council, a new state chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) formed in 2008, is helping the green movement go mainstream. The group promotes buildings that are environmentally responsible, cost-effective and healthy places to live and work.

"People see that green buildings can deliver solutions to many of today's economic challenges, like cutting energy costs through the use of energy-saving appliances, lighting and advanced heating and cooling systems," says Connie McGreavy, chair of the state's USGBC chapter. "Many companies that have invested in new technologies will tell you their investments have quickly paid off in lower energy and operating costs."

A major goal of the chapter is to educate builders in green building design and energy efficiency practices. The group held a joint seminar with the Rhode Island Builders Association in February that drew about 75 builders, developers, homeowners and others interested in learning about residential green building standards. During the year, the chapter will offer at least eight public workshops covering new construction and major renovations, greening of existing buildings, and operations and maintenance. The line-up includes Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) courses, the USGBC's green building standard.

There are now more than 150 LEED accredited professionals in the state. Three buildings are LEED certified and 45 more have applied for certification.

The Rhode Island chapter has 125 members and is growing rapidly. Members come from across the building industry, including building owners and end-users, real estate developers, architects, designers, engineers, general contractors, subcontractors, product and building system manufacturers, government agencies, educational institutions and nonprofit organizations.

Nineteen directors, all members of the USGBC, sit on the board of the chapter. They represent the state departments of administration and education, universities and several major businesses, including Bank of America and architectural, construction and property management firms in the region. The New England Institute of Technology hosts the chapter at its campus in Warwick, Rhode Island.

"Environmentally friendly building is here to stay," said McGreavy. "We will soon have the critical mass to take this to a new level in the next few years in Rhode Island."

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