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Architects go green for warehouse conversion

Aiming for gold - Inside and out, an office-retail building blooms with a conservation ethic

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OREGON CITY -- Two friends stand in front of the green-designed building they've renovated, watching salmon leap. The 6-foot-long metal fish, sculpted from scraps from the old Copeland Lumber warehouse, rise on poles from the center of a bioswale. The long canoe-shaped ditch, lined with rocks and plants, cleanses stormwater runoff.

"They're really cool," says Garrin Royer, 32, eyeing the shimmering fish. "They're my favorite part of the project."

Developers Royer and Danny McGinley, 33, have spent \$6 million turning the pumpkin orange warehouse at 221 Molalla Ave. into a sleek, energy-efficient office and retail building. They're aiming for a gold designation from the U.S. Council of Buildings this winter. That's the second-highest rating possible, based on points for energy-efficient and resource-conscious features.

Although some government buildings have Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification, theirs would be the first privately financed building in Clackamas County to receive the honor. Construction, which started in April, will be complete in late November, with doors opening in January.

"We're filling up landfills faster than we ever have," says Royer, who's dressed casually in cotton slacks. "The population in the world is growing, and we can't continue to abuse the natural environment the way we always have."

About 7 percent of the total cost -- \$400,000 -- paid for green features.

Both men are fathers of small children and hope to leave an environmental legacy for their grandchildren.

"We've wandered the woods of the Northwest with fly rods," says McGinley, speaking of treks with his old friend. "We've developed an appreciation for the unique things in the Pacific Northwest and want to do nothing to sully that through the course of our business."

McGinley and Royer walk through the front doors of the rust and green two-story building, pointing out its energy-saving features with gleeful frugality.

Sunlight floods through skylights and large windows, cutting down the need for electricity. High-quality insulation and motion-sensing light fixtures also help the building use 40 percent less electricity than the code requires.

"We recycled or reused 98 percent of the materials from the original building, cutting down on the materials that end up in the landfill," says Royer, treading across gray recycled carpeting laid in squares so a stained section can be replaced without removing the entire carpet.

McGinley pointed to the canopies that cover the windows, helping to cool the space naturally. The building uses low-flow water fixtures. Drought-tolerant plants require no irrigation system.

The building has 25,000 square feet of office space and 10,000 square feet for retail shops. The builders added a second story, maintaining the original shell of the warehouse.

Oregon City just completed a street improvement project along Molalla Avenue, which also spurred development of the building.

So far, about 50 percent of the spaces have been leased through verbal commitments. The two developers, along with a silent partner, bought the building through their company, Modoc Investments. Red Side Development, which they founded in 2002, renovated the 1980 warehouse.

The developers consulted with Elaine Aye of Green Building Services, an organization that coordinates the team members working on such structures. Ryan Miyahara of Ankrom Moisan was the architect.

"All the chemicals, all the glue, all the paint has a low VOC emissions," said Aye, referring to volatile organic compounds that emit gases that sicken many people. "If you're a tenant, the air quality is better."

Even the janitorial and landscaping maintenance of the building will avoid toxic chemicals, she said.

Looking out the second floor windows of the building, Royer points to the re-painted houses and businesses below.

"The activity creates more activity," he says. "It's spurred other private folks and business and landowners to improve their buildings."

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