

# Gone green, able to prove it

Office, warehouse blaze certified trail in environmental construction

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It looks like a nice but not unusual office and warehouse complex, similar to many others in Rochester.

It is unique, however. The year-old Nietz Electric building at 4475 U.S. 14 West is the first certified green building in Rochester.

Other than the big glass plaque declaring it LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified, the only green element seems to be the color on the walls.

“There is no solar array on the roof. No wind turbine out front,” said Mike Benike, who is in charge of LEED for general contractor A.E. Benike, Inc.

Finished in April 2008, the certification was not granted until a year later once all of the “environmental” points were calculated.

Many other local projects, including the eight-story Minnesota Biobusiness Center, have or will apply for LEED certification.

Going through the process was challenging because there were not a lot of examples to follow,” said Benike.

“It was kind of like blazing a new trail,” he said.

Jim Carver and Tim Fink, who both work in the building with their staff, say they are pleased with the results. The design

brings in lots of outside light into their offices and work areas.

“A lot of the time we don’t even turn on the lights in the hall when we come in,” said Fink.

All of the office lights are controlled by both motion and light sensors. Like many offices, the lights turn off if there is no movement in the room.



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**The lights in the hallway of the Nietz Electric building, 4475 U.S. 14 West, have motion and light sensors. The lights come on only if there is not enough natural light in the space or if someone walks into the hallway.**



Benike



Carver

## STATISTICS

A sampling of some of the green numbers on the Nietz Electric building, the first LEED certified building in Rochester:

- More than 30 percent of materials used in construction were recycled.
- More than 30 percent of the materials used were from within a 500-mile radius of the site.
- More than 50 percent of the wood products were from a sustainably managed forest.

However, the sensors also judge if there is enough natural light in the room. If so, the electric lights won’t turn on.

Benike estimates the interior lights are about 50 percent more efficient than those in a typical building.

Overall, he put the building’s energy usage at 18 percent better than a standard office. The savings for all utilities runs about \$3,000 a year, he said.

“There is payback there. Those are real dollars,” said Carver.

While Benike was the general contractor, Nietz handled its own electrical, mechanical and “curtain wall” work. The curtain wall is the large aluminum framed windows in the offices.

“Besides being good for us, it demonstrates our ability to do this work for prospective customers,” said Carver.

The main “green” aspect of the building is its energy conservation, but it goes beyond that. The shelving in the warehouse is second-hand, the use of rocks instead of grass for landscaping saves water and the use of paints and flooring with low volatile organic compounds are healthier.

LEED certification was important to Benike and Nietz.

“It shows that our work is credible,” said Carver.

Benike sees LEED as a documented way to prove a building is environmentally friendly.

“There are a lot of people ‘greenwashing.’ Just saying stuff is green,” he said. “This is all certified and documented. It is the real deal.”