

Kansas City Business Journal - February 8, 2010
kansascity.com/stories/2010/02/08/focus4.html

KANSAS CITY BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, February 5, 2010

Improvements educate, attract new clients

Kansas City Business Journal - by [Tammy Worth](#) Contributing Writer

A wind turbine rising 83 feet above **A.L. Huber General Contractor's** Overland Park headquarters stands as a testament to the company's commitment to practice what it preaches.

Installed in November, the wind turbine is part of the company's Renewable Energy Demonstration Initiative (REDI), a partnership with Kansas City engineering firm **Burns & McDonnell**.

"We want to take a leadership position in sustainability, and we want clients to think of us first when they want to do a project," said Phillip Thomas, president of A.L. Huber.

A.L. Huber is among many in the construction industry that are making changes to their properties to educate and attract clients.

During the next year, the company will make modifications to its headquarters building, including solar panels, energy-efficient lighting, a sun screen made of reclaimed wood and a green wall covered in vegetation.

"We are LEED-accredited professionals, and our customers are curious about doing the right thing," Thomas said, referring to the **U.S. Green Building Council's** Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program. "And it is one thing to say, 'We read about this in a book or saw a project,' and another to say, 'Here is what we've done, what worked, what the payback time is and what is cool about this.'"

Thomas said that about 60 percent to 70 percent of the REDI projects could apply to most office environments. Although the company is focusing on education, it definitely doesn't hurt sales.

McCownGordon Construction LLC often works on sustainable building projects and has an internal focus as well. The company created an eco-friendly mobile office trailer for job sites. It was built by ripping down an old trailer that was headed for a landfill and refurbished with a wind turbine, solar panels, solar shades, spray insulation and materials such as low-VOC (volatile organic compounds) paint and formaldehyde-free furniture.

"It has gained a lot of interest from clients who walk through it," said spokeswoman Krista Kutter, who added that educating people about sustainable design was the main purpose of the project. "It elevates everything we highlight and everything we say we do."

The trailer is one of many efforts by the company to highlight the environment. McCownGordon has a sustainability committee that creates projects for the company and works with clients. The builder also provides hybrid cars the staff can drive and incorporates everyday measures such as recycling and using energy-efficient light bulbs in its building.

Burns & McDonnell also is looking within to make changes.

"We have done a lot of sustainability projects for clients, but we hadn't addressed where we live, not our building and campus where we are at," spokesman Roger Dick said.

The company committed \$1 million in 2008 to work on bioretention on its Kansas City campus and building improvements such as a 5,000-watt solar installation. Dick said the firm hopes to reach LEED Silver certification.

He said that he has given tours of the project and that it has received attention from clients and business partners. Although the changes weren't made strictly for marketing, Dick said benefits include greater credibility with clients by showing them the water and electrical savings.

"I think it's mandatory for a company that is intending to recommend sustainable solutions to customers that they are able to prove they are walking the talk," he said. "We sell on the basis of credibility and trust, so we have to prove that we are living by the principles we are recommending to clients."

Tammy Worth | Worth is a freelance writer in the Kansas City area.

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.



SARAH DOOLEY | A.L. HUBER GENERAL CONTRACTOR

The 83-foot-tall wind turbine at A.L. Huber General Contractor's Overland Park office is part of the company's efforts to take a lead in sustainability and educate its clients.

[View Larger](#)