

Life for the Sophisticated Florida Woman

VIVVO®

the *Green*
ISSUE

Healthy Living

ORGANIC EATS, FLA'S GREEN
CITIES, ECO TRENDS &
MORE!

PLUS!
HOT WINTER

Fashion



Where the Green

by Debra Wood

Women throughout the state are leading local governments' green initiatives as officials recognize the communal benefit of conserving resources and preserving the environment.

"We, as females, have an innate desire to be sustainable and pass a better world on to future generations," says Nina Powers, education specialist in the office of sustainability for Sarasota County, one of the first government entities to embrace green programs.

Sarasota's involvement dates to 1998 when it joined the U.S. Department of Energy's Rebuild America program, which is a network of community-based partnerships across the nation that are committed to saving energy, improving building performance, easing air pollution through reduced energy demand, and enhancing the quality of life through energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies.

The county builds U.S. Green Building Council Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-certified buildings. Projects earn points for sustainable features, recycling and use of local materials. It encourages property owners to maintain trees. Developers with a green project receive fast-track approvals from the planning department.

"We are committed to reducing fossil fuel use," Powers says. "We hope our buildings will be carbon neutral by 2030."

Although Sarasota was early out of the gate, it was not the first county to achieve Florida Green Building Coalition (FGBC) local government certification. That honor goes to Pinellas County, which earned the designation in October 2006.

Interestingly, Pinellas stumbled onto its green status when post-graduate student Jillian Crippen, now with the planning department, took on a project to identify sustainable practices. She met with department heads, learned what they were up to, and compiled the information.

"I was amazed how much they were doing on their own, and no one was given any publicity to it," Crippen says.

Pinellas' fleet has converted to biodiesel fuels. It recycles antifreeze and



La Entrada in St. Petersburg

replaces burned out traffic light bulbs with LED fixtures that use less energy. The cooperative extension department encourages citizens to insulate, convert to fluorescent light bulbs and install low-flow toilets. Since 1983, Pinellas has turned refuse into energy, generating enough power to light 40,000 homes.

"A lot has been going on for years," says Tom Iovino, public information officer for the county. "We do what makes sense financially. It's not only conserving energy but also conserving taxpayer dollars that's the big key."

St. Petersburg is the only other municipality to achieve FGBC certification. St. Petersburg officials began promoting water conservation about 20 years ago. It has an extensive reclamation system to reuse treated wastewater for landscaping. The city is building a hybrid vehicle fleet and using biodiesel fuel. It is converting light bulbs in city buildings to energy efficient compact fluorescent. It also is switching traffic signals to LED.

"Many of the green initiatives are cost effective and will save the taxpayer dollars," says Mike Connors, internal services administrator assigned by St. Pete Mayor Rick Baker to environmental issues. In addition, "the local



Grass Grows

How Florida's cities are taking action with green initiatives

economy is tourist based. Preserving and enhancing the environment preserves the local economy."

St. Petersburg promotes private green building through expedited permitting and lower fees. It also has partnered in the Midtown Green affordable-housing project with Grady Pridden Inc. of St. Petersburg and Habitat for Humanity. The city maintains ownership of the land. The 30 town-home units will feature noncombustible, mold-resistant, recyclable materials; skylights to bring in natural light; solar thermal hot water units; and solar electrical generation.

Other cities turning green

Two other cities, Tallahassee and Dunedin; a town, Davie; and three counties, Indian River, Orange and Sarasota, have formally indicated their intent to go through the certification process.

Additionally, the city of Tamarac aims to obtain certification, according to Jennifer Bramley, director of community development. She feels the city can achieve the designation at very little cost to the taxpayer.

Orlando also joins the cause by committing \$500,000 in its current budget to fund 33 sustainable projects.

"We want this to be broad," says Marsha Segal-George, deputy chief administrative officer for Orlando. "[They are] the kind of projects you feel good about. You hope the sum of all the things will have an impact."

The city is mapping its carbon footprint and will set goals to lower it. Orlando also has undertaken an urban forest project. It will assess how many trees the city has and recommend additional trees to obtain at least 40 percent tree coverage.

"A tree canopy provides more shade and significantly reduces the urban heat index," Segal-George says.

Orlando has trained 50 employees in the permitting and planning departments in LEED principles. The city has opened two LEED-certified fire stations. The balcony off the mayor's office will soon sport a green



The future Biscayne Landing in North Miami

roof. Its public utility, the Orlando Utilities Commission, is building a new LEED-certified headquarters downtown and recently scrapped plans for a coal-fired power plant.

"The city of Tallahassee has quite an aggressive renewable power program," says spokeswoman Elizabeth Johnson. The municipal utility has one of only two hydroelectric electric plants in the state, and it is in the process of starting a water-reuse facility.

continued on page 113



By 2010, Tallahassee will generate a portion of its energy using a process called plasma arc that vaporizes garbage. A biomass plant that utilizes waste wood also is slated for 2010, Johnson says.

New communities strive for sustainability

Future communities also are going green, as developers set sustainability as a priority.

Biscayne Landing, a 200-acre, master-planned, mixed-use community in North Miami, has been accepted into the LEED for Neighborhood Development Pilot Program, says spokeswoman Jennifer Becker. The project will add 6,000 homes and a town center, with drought-tolerant xeriscaping and irrigation from captured rainwater. In addition to the neighborhood LEED designation, developers plan to pursue LEED certification for individual buildings at the former landfill. The City of North Miami owns the property and has leased it to Boca Developers in a unique public/private partnership.

On a 130-acre site in St. Petersburg, Grady Pridgen plans 2,500 residential units at La Entrada. The residential and office community will employ environmentally safe building materials and will give preferential parking to electric and hybrid cars.

In the panhandle, all of the homes built at Alys Beach must meet FGBC standards. A full-time environmental program manager oversees environmental aspects of the growing town. White exterior walls and rooftops reflect sunlight. Special window coatings let light in but filter out heat buildup. Many of homes feature geothermal heating and cooling, taking advantage of the natural temperature of the earth. Cobblestone streets allow 35 percent of rainfall to flow into the ground.

What's driving the trend?

"Green buildings are more energy, water and resource efficient," says land-use attorney Estrellita S. Sibila, a LEED-accredited attorney with Weiss Serota Helfman Pastoriza Cole & Boniske, PL of Coral Gables. "Not only is it the right thing to do in terms of environmental policy, but it also saves taxpayers' money."

Sibila indicates the Governor Charlie Crist's policy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and requiring state buildings to be LEED certified serves as an example to other governments. She finds cities are adopting different strategies, from making anti-idling policies to requiring LEED certifications.

"Green building is not a straight concept," Sibila says. "It's fluid. Different attributes make a sustainable policy."

Suzanne B. Cook, executive director of the FGBC adds, "Economically, environmentally and health wise, there is no reason not to do it."

Cook has noted an increase in calls from local governments wanting to find out more about certification.

"The key impetus for government should be the welfare of the public," Cook says. "In doing the certification process, it helps them reduce capital expenditures, and it helps them reduce their water and energy needs." ▼