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LEED certification growing as more professionals seek the designation

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The grass may well be greener on the other side of the fence, but buildings are getting greener, whether they're on the other side of the street or not.

And along with the advent of healthier buildings comes the "accredited professional" designation offered by the **United States Green Building Council**. These professionals are knowledgeable about what it takes to build a structure certified compliant with the USGBC's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design program.

A LEED-certified structure, says USGBC's Web site, focuses on five "key areas of human and environmental health": 1) sustainable site development; 2) water savings; 3) energy savings; 4) materials selection; and 5) indoor environmental quality. LEED accredited professionals help their clients attain those goals.

"It's getting wider all the time. We would like to expand our membership," says Sarah Hadskey of membership in the 1-year-old Memphis Regional Chapter of the USGBC. The current 37 members are, like Hadskey, primarily architects.

"We're trying to get more engineers and others in the commercial building industry," says Hadskey, sole proprietor of architecture firm **SAM Studio**.

Becoming a LEED accredited professional is open to anyone who wants to pay the \$350 fee and take the test. According to the USGBC Web site, architects, engineers and contractors commonly seek the designation, though others in the commercial building management, construction and maintenance sectors are also encouraged to get on board.

"I wanted to be a better asset to my clients," says Jeff Gatlin, mechanical engineer with **Thompson Engineers**. He earned his LEED designation three years ago.

When Gatlin took the hour-and-a-half long test there was only one LEED certification, but that has been expanded to include three different specialty fields: new construction, commercial interiors and existing buildings.

Gatlin points out that having a LEED accredited professional on the design team for a structure counts as a point toward earning the structure LEED compliance.

"The test was difficult, very comprehensive," says Russ Phillips, a mechanical engineer who serves as sales engineer for Trane commercial air conditioning. He took the test last October.

"I work in sales and wanted to be knowledgeable about LEED," Phillips says.

He explains that LEED certification of buildings is multi-tiered. Of the 69 points attainable, gaining 26 gives LEED certified status. In ascending order, 33 points is silver, 39 is gold and 52 or more points is platinum.

"In my opinion, LEED is a great thing," Phillips says. "(Energy usage constitutes) the biggest portion of the point scale. It's very aimed at air quality and energy efficiency. From Trane's perspective, we like to say we can assist with 35 of those 69 points."

His effort to add the LEED suffix to his title has already paid off; Phillips points to a recent project Trane wanted to bid on, but the equipment specifications seemed to rule out the company.

"I researched and proved that our equipment does fit," Phillips says. "(Certification) definitely has helped. From a manufacturing standpoint, I know what is required."

At engineering firm **Allen & Hoshall**, Rick Boeving works as the company's lead architect. He earned his LEED accredited professional designation four years ago, making him one of the first in the Memphis area to do so. Eight other Allen & Hoshall employees now hold the certification.

"I just saw it was coming to the industry," Boeving says of his motivation to seek the designation. "Our firm has always been interested in energy savings."

Boeving reports Allen & Hoshall is working on its first LEED project, a hospital seeking LEED status, though he can't give details of the undertaking.

Some owners balk at the increased cost to build to LEED specifications, but Boeving says "the Mid-South is coming around." The additional costs can vary widely.

"One of the drawbacks I see is that people who want LEED certification get close, then see what is involved and back off," says Gatlin. "It can add 5%-10% to the final cost."

Hadskey notes that LEED methodology, currently most prolific around "the rim" of the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, actually calls for structures being built the way they have been for centuries, constructed to best exploit the climatic and other environmental factors in a given location.

"Selling it is really not so difficult if the client wants a good, sustainable building," Boeving says. "Our company has been doing this (kind of design) since before LEED."

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