

# IN THE LEED

Ithaca is trying to make a name for itself in the green world

By DANIELLE HENBEST

In the spirit of the green movement building momentum across the country, buildings are now sustainable, improving the quality of the environment as well as the health of its inhabitants. Ithaca is one community that has taken hold of the trend by developing more and more LEED-certified buildings.

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, is a Green Building Rating System developed by the U.S. Green Building Council providing standards for environmentally sustainable construction including the ambience of a building. Since 1998, LEED has grown to encompass over 14,000 projects in all 50 United States and 30 countries, covering 1 billion square feet of development area.

And Ithaca has its fair share.

Most notably, Ithaca College School of Business is currently in the process of attempting to become a LEED platinum-certified building, while the Gateway Building, future home to IC administration, is being built to LEED certifications. Cayuga Medical Center, Mack Travis' downtown Gateway Plaza Associates, and Jeffrey Rimland's planned downtown hotel are all certified, purposely built LEED, or in the process of becoming LEED certified.

According to Christopher Glaubitz, architect for The Thomas Group, LEED was originally created to substantiate the performance of a "green" product.

"The U.S. Green Building Council created LEED to prevent green washing, the practice of making unsubstantiated claims about the performance of a product and in this case, buildings," said Glaubitz. "What is there really behind a green product? I think we're seeing a lot of that right now with products, wondering what rigorous standard (there is) by which anyone is comparing these projects in detail to be claimed as green."

There are various guidelines and regulations to build LEED certified. The project is tallied via a point-based rating system — 69 available points — that is intended to compare the relative sustainability or environmental performance of the building. A building can be LEED certified, silver, gold or platinum, the highest certification. Only after a project is complete is the certification approved or denied. There are five areas to meet LEED standards: sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources, and indoor environmental quality.

Ithaca College Business School was built in mind to meet many requirements in each LEED area. For example, the school has a vegetative roof alive with rugged, drought-resistant vegetation that provides insulation, retaining heat during

winter, thereby reducing the building's overall energy needs. The roof also captures and uses rain instead of having run off drain into the sewer system. Another qualification is that roughly half of the building's materials were produced locally, limiting pollution from transportation of materials. More than 90 percent of the waste produced during building construction was diverted from landfills. Providing a healthy indoor environment with natural light is another LEED point to obtain. The



IC's new Business School. (Photo provided)

Business School's narrow east-to-west design maximizes the amount of available sunlight, reducing energy usage and providing better quality lighting. Over 90 percent of the building's spaces have natural daylight and views of the lake.

Doesn't this sound expensive? According to Carl Sgrecci, vice president finance and administration for Ithaca College, the upfront expense is well worth the long-run savings.

"We're finding that we don't believe that some of the averages that people talk about in the past as a premium to build LEED," said Sgrecci. "They say that cost of building a LEED platinum building could be as much as 8 percent more than a standard building. Our experience with the business building and even more so with the Gateway is not quite much more. We're thinking the costs are more around 4 percent more. Those costs will result in energy savings over time. They will ultimately have a payback to the institution. That makes the premium worth while."

Sgrecci added that the Gateway building is expected to generate a savings of \$35,000 per year thanks to using geothermal technology for heating and cooling.

Glaubitz said that many local municipalities are passing ordinances that buildings and even schools being built have to meet a certain standard.

"LEED is the one they usually tie their standard to," said Glaubitz. "That's something that Ithaca may be thinking more about." ■