



It is Easy Being Green

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Director Alvin Collins, who owns a construction consulting firm that focuses on sustainable developments, suggested that Fidelity Bank build its new corporate center under the Advanced Buildings program in 2005. The bank then asked him to get involved as project manager.

LEOMINSTER -- Standing by wall-to-wall windows overlooking the Leominster Connector and surrounding woods on a recent morning, Fidelity Bank Senior Vice President Paul Przybyla quipped that the company could have easily made the sunny second-floor corner of its corporate center into an executive's office.

It didn't. Instead, the company put in a table for employees to sit around and relax. Steps away are workstations, with even second- and third-row cubicles getting plenty of natural light.

Those sitting closer to the windows never have to

shiver from winter air while others sweat; each room has multiple "climate zones," complete with temperature-control units.

From lighting efficiency to special ventilation systems, the 18-month-old corporate center comes with many features designed to help workers feel more comfortable. It was the brainchild of Bank Director Alvin Collins, owner of Groton-based Habitat Advisory Group, a construction consulting firm that focuses on sustainable developments.

Fidelity Bank is a 120-year-old community bank that's not associated with Fidelity Investments, the Boston-based mutual fund giant.

Fidelity Bank Corporate Center opened its doors in January 2007, becoming one of the first "green" buildings constructed in Massachusetts under the Advanced Buildings (AB) program. Developed by the New Building Institute, a White Salmon, Wash.-based non-profit organization, the AB program provides design guidelines to promote energy efficiency in new commercial constructions between 10,000 and 75,000 square feet.

Though Fidelity spent \$100,000 more to build the corporate center under AB guidelines, the green building has already saved the company more than \$27,000 annually in utility costs, debunking the myth that "green" means higher costs, according to Collins.

"You don't have to go so far out there (to make buildings green)," Collins told business owners at a tour at the bank Thursday that was organized by the Devens Enterprise Commission. "You just have to think through the process and make it better."

John Finamore, vice president of business development for Senate Construction Corp. in

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Shirley, was among those on tour. He said demand for green buildings has increased recently because of soaring energy costs.



Fidelity Bank's corporate headquarters, which opened in January 2007, features large windows that dramatically reduce the need to use electric lights. SUN/HIROKO SATO

"It's waking people up," Finamore said.

In each state, the AB program involves different utility agencies, which provide technical assistance and financial incentives for projects. In Massachusetts, National Grid, Nstar, Western Massachusetts Electric and Cape Light Compact are AB sponsors. Fidelity built the new center with the help of National Grid, including a \$66,000 reimbursement from the company. After taking the incentive into consideration, the bank used only \$34,000 out of its pocket to make the building green, and recouped the cost in just over a year.

The AB criteria are similar to that of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design -- or commonly known as LEED, developed by the U.S. Green Building Council, according to Collins, who got involved in the bank project as project manager in 2005. But what makes AB special, he added, is that it is easier to achieve than LEED while still cutting utility costs by 30 percent compared to

conventional buildings built under the state energy codes.

The large windows and glass walls used throughout the 47,000-square-foot building made it possible to place ceiling light fixtures every 12 feet instead of the 8 feet an architect originally planned. Lights go off automatically when there is no activity in the area, and the high-performance glazing of the windows makes it easier to use computers in the natural light. The building has additional insulation and special heating and cooling systems that are turned on only when necessary.

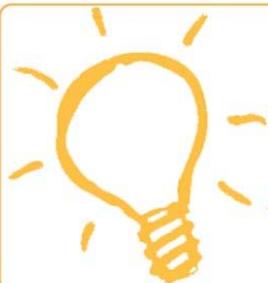
Of the \$27,600 annual energy saving, \$18,900 is attributed to heating and ventilation and \$7,200 to lighting.

Even before adopting AB guidelines, the bank never intended to reserve window areas for executives, Collins said. President Edward Manzi's office is inside the first-floor retail area, which centers around a sunlight-filled lobby with the coffee and computer stations for customers. The bank allowed employees to select artwork for the beige walls.

Neil Angus, staff planner for Devens Enterprise Commission, said green buildings are appealing to businesses because they are often appraised at higher values and have higher occupancy rates. They also keep employees healthier, he added.

The Commission promotes sustainable industrial development and business practice through its EcoStar program, and 35 area businesses have taken advantage of its free workshops and consultation services, Angus said.

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