

Businesses are going green

By Susan Bellerose
Wednesday, August 1, 2007

“Green” building is a phrase that we are hearing frequently these days. It is a term used to describe buildings that are designed to be more efficient in their use of energy, water, and building materials with an eye toward using renewable resources, reducing waste and pollution, and improving air quality, thus aiding the environment.

One local business that has taken the first steps to go “green” is West Newton restaurant Lumière, which is now on a short list of restaurants nationwide that has received green certification from the Green Restaurant Association. Lumière has started an extensive recycling program, and is using recycled paper products, low voltage fluorescent lighting and low flow kitchen spray nozzles. Styrofoam products are not used in the kitchen or for takeout containers, because they are non-biodegradable.

Lumière has also started composting, which adds to expense, but is made possible by the fact that an organization called Save That Stuff picks up composting material from Whole Foods as well. Spent fryer oil is collected by Green Grease Monkey and recycled for use as an alternative to diesel fuel. Chef/Owner Michael Leviton says that Lumière will continue to look for additional ways to be green, such as examining solar roof power and using non-toxic cleaning products where possible and that it’s “just the right thing to do.”

Another terrific example of a green building is the newly refurbished Boston Children’s Museum, which is putting the finishing touches on a \$47 million addition/remodel. This addition is expected to be LEED-certified within roughly six months of completion. “LEED” stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. Rick Stockwood, Director of Public and Government Relations, recently took me on a tour of the museum.

The most unique aspect of the refurbished museum is its “green” roof. Under the direction of Jeff Licht, founder of Plants Across Communities (PAC), three of the museum’s roofs have been covered with planters that will act as insulating barriers in both summer and winter, thus reducing energy costs and



Alexander and Isabel Rivero of West Newton, ages 6 and 11, examine one of the Boston Children’s Museum’s new green roof planters.

lessening the “heat island” effect, while adding to the beauty of the rooftop. In June, kids helped to plant one of the new green roofs, giving them great hands-on training in environmental stewardship.

Rainwater that is not absorbed by the green roof is captured by the museum’s new water reclamation system, which channels rainwater runoff from both the new and existing roofs into underground storage tanks. Grey water from the tanks is then used for plumbing for the low flush toilets and for irrigation. Toilet handles can be pressed “up” for liquid waste, using a low volume flush, or “down” for solid waste. Reclamation of rainwater also means less runoff (and therefore less pollution) into the Fort Point Channel where the Boston Children’s Museum is situated.

The museum also installed low voltage fluorescent energy-saving lights in the new addition, and used building materials with recycled content including steel, concrete and the unique new wood floor. Large windows allow for extensive use of natural light, which also saves on electric bills, and a trash-recycling program is expected to get underway soon.

Newton resident Ellen Thompson, Director of Education and Programs, says that the museum’s approach is to incorporate a green message throughout its programs in arts, health and culture. For instance, the health program teaches kids about eating healthy foods, including five colors a day, which ties into vegetable gardening, and the museum’s recycle shop supplies art materials for the art studio programs.

There will be savings for the museum over the long term from lower use of electricity, heat and water, but according to Chief Operating Officer Neil Gordon, the real impact from the museum’s point of view is helping kids understand the importance of environmental stewardship. The museum wants to convey a positive message about what we all can do to help the environment. Hopefully if this exposure starts at a young age, the newest generation will grow up learning how to incorporate small steps in their own lives that will help protect the environment over the long term.

Susan Bellerose holds degrees from Mount Holyoke College and Columbia Business School, and is a resident of Newton.