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Taking the LEED: New UNH dorm meets high efficiency standards in West Haven

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WEST HAVEN — Soundview Hall, the newly built residence hall at the University of New Haven, offers various amenities to students who live in the 400-bed apartment-style building, including some that are uncommon in many typical dorms — like recycling centers on each floor.

The residence hall is the first building on UNH's campus to achieve LEED certification. The building, based on a blueprint to incorporate various energy efficiency measures, has obtained LEED Gold Certification, according to Thomas Beebe, vice president of facilities at UNH.

LEED is a certification program created by the U.S. Green Building Council, which rates construction projects in five main categories: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and indoor environmental quality.

UNH has incorporated "green" measures into other buildings on campus, but Soundview Hall is the first to strive for, and achieve, the LEED certification, Beebe said.

"The drive behind that was to minimize our energy expenses," he said. "We think it's important to our students, our staff and our employees to demonstrate that commitment. The cost of energy will only go up (in the future) and we need to start looking for ways to control that."

Collectively, various steps taken when building Soundview Hall are expected to produce an annual energy savings of 235,507 kilowatt-hours, or \$40,036.19. The building also is expected to reap savings of 3,532,605 kilowatt-hours, or the equivalent of \$600,542.85, over the building's lifetime.

Among the "green" features incorporated into the building, there are recycling centers on each floor of the building, which are used frequently by residents. "We encourage the students to recycle," Beebe said, adding the centers are emptied twice a week.

The building also has highly efficient lights and toilet fixtures, and various "low-flow" fixtures to use less water. Outdoor lights are set on timers and indoor lights are linked to motion sensors so they turn off when rooms are unoccupied, Beebe said.

Officials also paid close attention to what materials were used to construct the building, opting for long-lasting materials that will require less frequent maintenance and replacements, thereby saving energy. Some of the building materials are partially made of recycled content. "More and more (recycled) materials are available today than there were even five

years ago," Beebe said.

An effort also was made to buy materials from local suppliers whenever possible, to save the energy it would take to have them shipped from further away, he said.

UNH worked with New Haven-based United Illuminating Co. and the Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund on the project.

Through the Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund, which UI administers within its service area, UNH received \$99,990 in incentive funds to help cover the cost of the project.

"UNH, for a while now, has recognized the value of energy efficiency. They always take advantage of our programs when they can," said Roy Haller, manager of commercial and industrial energy services at UI. "Everybody wants to be a green participant. By having a LEED Gold certified building, you can establish a lot of that (credibility)."

UI first got involved with the project in 2008, helping UNH form an "energy conscious blueprint."

"We want to be (involved) at the very beginning" of a project like this, Haller said, since it is much easier to make a building energy efficient from the outset than it is to go back and try to retroactively upgrade it once it is constructed.

UI urged UNH, as it does with many of its commercial customers, to exceed the state building code when it comes to energy efficiency. Regarding lighting, for instance, UI urges commercial customers to aim for 30 percent or more efficiency than is required by building codes — a benchmark UNH has achieved at Soundview Hall.

"We're trying to offer incentives to get customers to move from standard efficiency to a higher level of efficiency," he said.

So far, students' response to the new residence hall has been extremely positive, Beebe said, and students are excited to be part of a green initiative on campus.

"Students are very energy conscious, and they enjoy that reputation and they enjoy participating in those things," he said.

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