

Prayer on the prairie

Benedictine monastery reflects 'care of the earth' By Rich Redman

The mission of the Benedictine Women of Madison proved both a challenge and an opportunity as the planners, architects and construction managers worked on plans for Holy Wisdom Monastery:

Weaving prayer, hospitality, justice and care of the earth into a shared way of life as an ecumenical Benedictine community.

Now, some three years later, the monastery built by Hoffman LLC of Appleton is in the running for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum certification from the U. S. Green Building Council (USGBC) that could make it the highest rated LEED building in the country.

Since 1966, the Benedictine sisters had operated the Saint Benedict Center in Middleton, a retreat and conference facility that welcomed Christians and seekers of all world religions. In 1996, the sisters launched a 13-year project of restoring 95 acres of farmland to prairie, and dredging and restoring a glacial lake as part of their commitment to “care of the earth.” They eventually determined that the original Benedict House needed to be replaced with a smaller, more energy-efficient building that better supported their values. That’s where Hoffman got involved.

“Part of our challenge was to create a building that was pleasing aesthetically, that would become part of the natural landscape – that would become the background for



PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF HOFFMAN LLC

The 30,136-square-foot Holy Wisdom Monastery built in Middleton by Hoffman LLC of Appleton is in the running for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Platinum certification from the U. S. Green Building Council (USGBC) that could make it the highest rated LEED building in the country.

the activities that would happen there, including contemplation – without having it be plain or underdesigned,” says Catherine Cruickshank, Hoffman senior project designer. “Its simplicity has its own beauty.”

The overall project is green in a number of ways. First, the original Benedict House was deconstructed responsibly. The organ was removed, refurbished and installed in the new building. Nine tons of building materials were donated to Habitat ReStore; 8,628 tons were recycled, including the concrete which was crushed as a base for the parking and

drives and sculpted into berms. The lowest level of the building was saved and remodeled into a maintenance facility for the whole complex. In all, 99.75 percent of Benedict House was diverted from the landfill.

The new 30,136-square-foot Holy Wisdom Monastery building itself has a monastic simplicity to keep it from being a distraction to quiet contemplation. The interior includes a main chapel (a multi-purpose “assembly space” that can also be used for concerts and lectures), offices and conference rooms, a library, main and daily dining areas and a four-car garage with vegetated roof.

Its curving forms blend with the natural contours of the land, and large, carefully placed windows capture and frame views of the trees, prairie, and lakes. Made of high-performance glass to ensure heat losses/gains are minimal, the windows and skylights provide abundant daylight. At night, highly efficient fluorescent light fixtures strategically reflect light off the upper walls and ceilings.

On the mechanical side, energy use estimates show that the building will be 60 percent more efficient on an energy cost basis than a LEED baseline building. The maintenance building houses circulating and heat pumps for the geothermal system, which consists of 39 wells, each 300 feet deep. Natural gas heaters provide instant hot water, and water usage is reduced by over 43 percent because of low-flow fixtures. About 60 percent of all new wood in the building is Forest Stewardship Council

(FSC) certified. Recycled materials, local and regional materials and rapidly renewal materials were used in many aspects of the project.

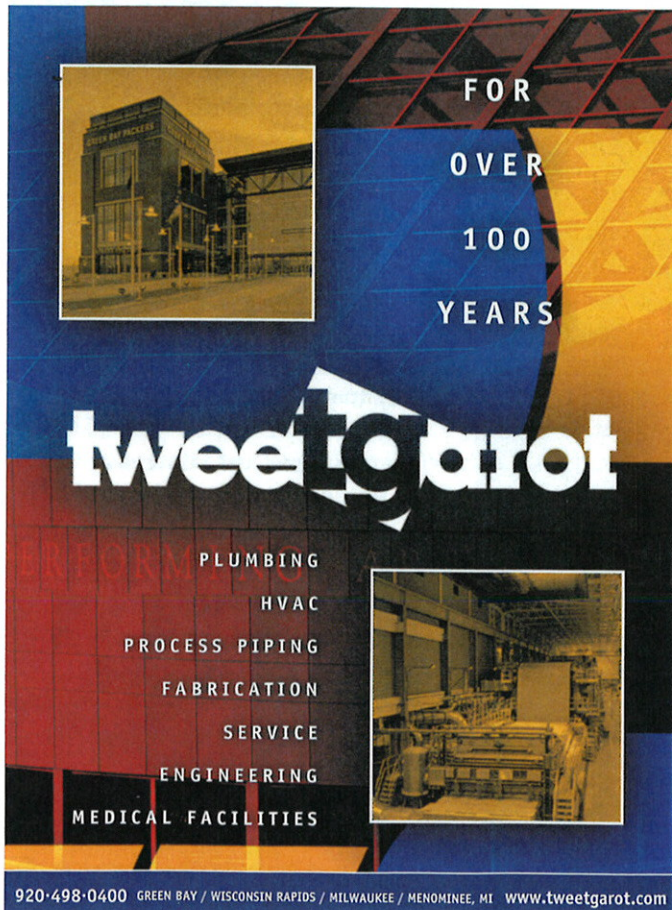
Solar light fixtures are featured in the parking lots. A white membrane roof, highly reflective pavers, and vegetated roofs help to keep the surroundings cool. Rain is collected in rain barrels for landscape watering. Storm water runoff from the site has been reduced to 13 percent below pre-development levels. Photovoltaic panels on the southwest slope of the Assembly Room (chapel) roof provide 13 percent of the total energy cost. That system is designed to be expanded, and the goal is to eventually provide 100 percent of the monastery's energy needs from on-site, renewable resources.

The new facility was completed last August and launched with an open house in November. It has already welcomed more than 1,300 visitors.

"It's designed to be a living, learning laboratory to encourage people to be one with, and sustain the natural elements of, creation," says Neal Smith, executive director of the monastery. "It very much mirrors our mission and vision, and enhances it."

Within the next few weeks, those involved should learn the final LEED rating from the USGBC.

"We're optimistic it will earn a Platinum designation, and there's a chance that it will earn enough points to be the highest-rated LEED Platinum building in the country," says Mark Hanson, Hoffman's director of sustainable services. "We are also gratified that the project cost came in at \$241 per square foot, including all design, construction, demolition, commissioning and LEED certification costs. That's below the cost for other LEED or conventional buildings of the same quality." **i**

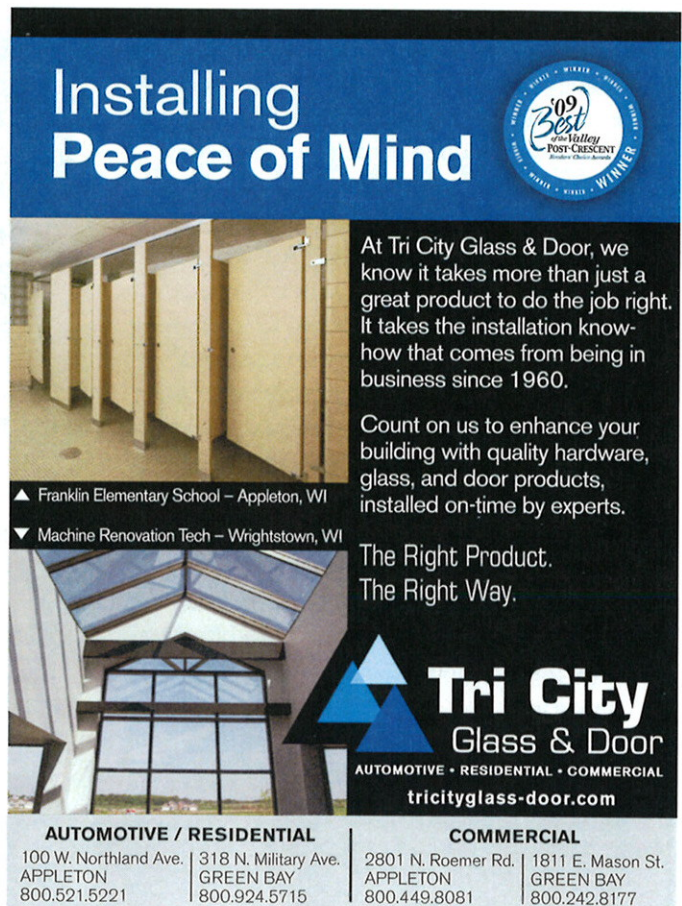


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