

Kern's first 'green' building certified

BY STACEY SHEPARD, Californian staff writer
e-mail: sshepard@bakersfield.com | Thursday, Feb 22 2007 10:35 PM

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The new Kern Schools Federal Credit Union headquarters is certifiably green.

PHOTOS:



Photo by Felix Adamo

Kern Schools Federal Credit Union President/CEO Vince Rojas in the boardroom with the U.S. Green Building Council award.

artificial lighting in the building, which required a detailed accounting of light bulbs and some last-minute adjustments, according to Loren Aiton, the building's lead architect from the architecture firm **Taylor Teter Partnership**.

"Every single watt in the building was counted," Aiton said. "We even made the interior design team reduce some lights in the CEO's office because they were putting us over the limit."

Some of the building's other green features include large windows made of specialized glass to provide ample natural light while not heating the building's interior, showers and bike racks to encourage employees to bike to work, a duct system that performs at 1 percent leakage and landscaping and irrigation that uses 50 percent less water.

The facility, which consists of twin three-story buildings that comprise about 70,000 square feet each, cost \$27 million to build. The enhancements came at a higher price but those costs are expected to be recouped in energy savings, according to Vincent Rojas, the credit union's chief executive officer.

The building opened in December 2005 but has already tallied major savings. Officials anticipated a 35 percent reduction in energy consumption compared with a similar, no-frills commercial office building. But the facility has shown a 50 percent reduction in the first year, according to Stacy Vergano, of Premier Management Co., which manages the property.

"There's a significant difference," said Vergano, citing a comparison she did between the energy costs of one of the credit union buildings to a building of similar size on California Avenue, which was built in the early 1980s and has had some efficiency upgrades.

The Ming Avenue office complex west of the Marketplace was recently notified that it has met the strict standards for being an ultra-environmentally-friendly facility set by the U.S. Green Building Council. It is the first building in Kern County to receive the certification.

Obtaining the lofty status requires minimizing impacts on the environment, reducing energy consumption and ensuring a safe indoor environment for employees.

For example, one criteria of certification required there be no more than a certain amount of

The 12-month analysis showed the California Avenue building's energy costs were 32 cents per square foot compared to the credit union buildings' 15 cents per square foot.

Both buildings are occupied by about 200 people and pay the same utility rate, Vergano said.

That type of reduction was music to the ears of Penny Fulton, senior vice president of administrative services for the credit union.

It was Fulton, after all, who initially suggested the credit union attempt to make its new facility a green building.

She took the idea to her boss after reading a story in the *Los Angeles Times* about a "green" Toyota building in the Los Angeles area.

"It just seemed like the right things to do," she said.

WHAT MAKES IT A GREEN BUILDING?

These are some of the reasons the new Kern Schools Federal Credit Union headquarters was given green certification by the U.S. Green Building Council.

- Builders used local materials to decrease transportation needed to supply materials.
- The buildings feature bike racks, showers and locker rooms to encourage biking or walking to work.
- Construction waste was recycled.
- The roof is coated with a bright, white material that reflects more than 90 percent of the sun's rays, reducing the amount of heat the building absorbs and the demand for air conditioning.
- Special windows provide maximum natural light but prevent heating of the interior.

- Lights are set to motion sensors.
- The air conditioning system doesn't use chemicals.
- Ducts transporting air conditioning have 1 percent leakage. Most buildings have systems with up to 25 percent leakage.
- Low-water plants and a bubbler irrigation system reduce landscape water consumption by 50 percent.
- Carpets are made of recycled material.
- Paints and glues used on the building's interior are free of gases harmful to those working in the building.
- Tile in the lobby can be cleaned without harsh chemicals.
- About 75 percent of employees have direct views to natural light.