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## Green building goes commercial

By Alec Rosenberg, BUSINESS WRITER

SRM ASSOCIATES has worked on prominent projects across the Bay Area: Pixar Animation Studios' campus in Emeryville, Zhone Technologies' headquarters in Oakland and University Circle next to Highway 101 in East Palo Alto.

Now the Alameda firm is looking for a new distinction: SRM wants to be the Bay Area's leading green commercial development company.

"Green building is really no longer a niche," SRM project manager Laura Billings said. "It is really exploding in growth. Very soon we think this will be standard practice."

Indeed, green office building has taken off. Projects registered with the U.S. Green Building Council more than doubled in the past year to above 1,700, with more than 280 projects in California. In the Bay Area, 10 to 20 percent of new commercial projects and nearly 30 percent of municipal projects are built with at least some green building practices, consultant Geof Syphers said.

Why are they going green? Studies show that green office buildings can lower energy bills, cut maintenance costs and even boost worker productivity, all for an average upfront cost of 2 to 4 percent more than conventional building. Building green both enhances the health of occupants and helps the environment by reducing electricity use, greenhouse gas emissions and landfill waste.

Government agencies are leading the way. They tend to own and occupy their buildings and see the long-term value of green building. Private corporations from the Gap in San Bruno to Toyota in Torrance have built signature green campuses. Now SRM hopes to get even more of the development industry on board.

SRM hosted a green building forum last month in Oakland attended by 150 people, including nearly 50 commercial real estate brokers.

"It takes the whole team ... the brokerage community, architects, engineers and general contractors," SRM principal Steve Meckfessel said. "We think it's time for adoption of green building practices in a major way. We want to send the message that this makes business sense."

SRM is going green because it sees the financial benefit and values green principles such as reuse, urban infill and sustainability.

SRM plans a green renovation of a building it owns on Milvia Street in Berkeley and is seeking other private and public sector opportunities, Billings said. Meanwhile, it is greening up the PowerBar building in Berkeley with a recycling program, green cleaning products and an upgraded HVAC system.

"It's worth it because of the environmental aspect, and you can have it make business sense. You're reducing the cost of garbage services," said Taylor Gill, vice president of Township Building Services, which provides janitorial and recycling services for clients including SRM and the Tribune Tower.

Large offices that start recycling programs can reduce their solid waste by more than half and cut their waste bills by \$1,000 a month, Gill said.

BT Commercial's Dave Klein, who attended SRM's forum, brokered 543 Howard St. in San Francisco, the Bay Area's first speculative green office building. He leased it quickly at a premium price, selling tenants on the energy savings.

"That's something the CFOs like to see," Klein said.

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Green office building got an early push in the 1970s under then-Gov. Jerry Brown and state architect Sim Van der Ryn. But it didn't take hold until the 1990s and began growing in 2000 with the introduction of U.S. Green Building Council's LEED — the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design rating system, said Berkeley physicist and green design consultant Donald Aitken.

About 5 percent of new U.S. commercial floor space is being constructed under LEED, which is based on categories from indoor environmental air quality to sustainable sites, said Syphers, KEMA director of green building services.

The Bay Area has more LEED-accredited professionals than anywhere else in the U.S., said Ann Ludwig, senior project manager with Alameda County's StopWaste.

StopWaste has worked on more than 70 LEED and non-LEED green public projects, she said. A dozen buildings are currently being designed to the LEED standard, including the Oakland International Airport's Terminal 2 expansion.

Rebates and tax credits have helped fuel the popularity of solar electric systems. Fast-growing PowerLight in Berkeley has been involved in dozens of Bay Area projects from wineries to Santa Rita Jail to Cal State East Bay.

PG&E offers free sustainable design resources at its Pacific Energy Center and free energy-efficiency design assistance for new commercial construction.

While progress has been made, awareness needs to be increased among banks, insurance firms and Wall Street, said U.S. Green Building Council co-founder David Gottfried, president of WorldBuild Technologies in Berkeley.

Gottfried wrote "Greed to Green" to describe his journey from greedy real estate developer to a founder of the green building movement.

"We could clearly do more," Gottfried said. "If everyone could green their lives, then we would have a green world."

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