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Agency's new building uses energy conservation it promotes

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From minimizing roof and parking lot runoff to maximizing use of daylight, the new West Side headquarters of Wisconsin Energy Conservation Corp. incorporates enough "green" building features to meet some of the highest standards for LEED — Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

WECC, a nonprofit organization that provides energy savings programs and services, offered an advance look at the building Thursday at 431 Charmany Drive in the University Research Park before its official opening next month.

Founded in 1980, WECC helps businesses design and implement energy-efficiency and renewable-energy programs. With about 100 employees and a \$53 million annual budget, the organization also administers the state's Focus on Energy program, which offers grant money.

"We tried to construct a building that is so consistent with our mission," said WECC executive director Janet Brandt. "We set out to prove that we could build it on a very affordable budget."

Brandt said the \$5 million, 34,500-square-foot building's environmental and energy features brought it within three points of the highest LEED rating from the U.S. Green Building Council.

She said the building's per-square-foot cost was \$120 for construction, \$10 for architecture and design and \$12.50 for site work.

About 7 percent of the building's total cost was invested in "green" features and Brandt said that cost may be recouped through energy savings in three to four years. That includes the cost of a solar electricity system that is expected to provide about 14 percent of the electricity. Solar panels also will provide about 40 percent of the hot-water needs.

The building was positioned on an east-west axis to take advantage of available daylight, said architect Steve Holzhauer of Eppstein Uhen Architects.

Besides its energy and environment features, Holzhauer said the building also was designed for the comfort of employees. Fluorescent lights and

mechanical system piping hang from the building's 14-foot open ceiling on the second floor.

Green buildings have become an industry standard, said Pete Vogel of Vogel Construction Co., which built the WECC building.

"The whole process has created marketplaces for the products and we're seeing the (construction) industry jump on the bandwagon," he said.

Mayor Dave Cieslewicz said the WECC project shows that green buildings also can be economically sound. He said the city also is upgrading many of its existing buildings to meet higher energy and environmental standards.

"The things we do to save energy and be good for the environment can turn out to be good for the taxpayers as well," he said.

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