

# Green Light

Architect Michael Carlson converts a 1930s building into an environmentally friendly office.



Big plans: Michael Carlson is using green building principles to modernize a historic downtown building.

WILLIAM S. SPEER

**>>Michael Carlson's hunt** for a new downtown office gave him an opportunity to practice what he preaches in a big way.

The Sarasota architect, who specializes in sustainable buildings, is renovating the 73-year-old Cheney Building at the northeast corner of Fruitville Road and Orange Avenue for his Carlson Studio Architecture offices, with about 1,900 square feet to spare to rent to a "low impact business."

After four months of putting up walls, energy-efficient windows and an Energy Star-rated roof, he's moving his 10 employees in this month. Carlson looked for space closer to the downtown core but couldn't find any affordable place with adequate parking. Then the Cheney building, built in 1934, came on the market—along with its 19 parking spots.

"We liked the idea of a big old building," Carlson says. "It's an ideal location. We'll be able to walk to lunch, it's near the bus station, and it makes alternative transportation an option for my staff."

**Carlson spent \$170,000 to renovate the Cheney Building, using green products like bamboo cabinetry and non-VOC paint.**

In the former market and warehouse, Carlson is creating one of the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) commercial interior projects in Florida. (LEED is a rating

program of the U.S. Green Building Council. To attain it, architects and builders must meet criteria in five areas: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and indoor environmental quality.)

It's much easier, of course, to create an environmental building from scratch than it is to retrofit an older one. While Carlson has designed new commercial buildings to meet LEED standards, including the county government building at Twin Lakes Park, this is the first time he's renovated an older commercial building. Only three other Florida builders have applied for the LEED commercial interior designation.

Materials must be chemical-free, flooring must be from renewable materials such as cork, and all the asbestos and lead paint must be stripped. Fortunately,



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Carlson says, a 1980s renovation by a former owner "removed all the bad stuff."

Still, Carlson says he spent about \$170,000. "Anytime you [redo] an old building, there are always hidden costs," he says.

Carlson preserved the architecture, including the Cheney name carved on the front of the building. He added 13 windows to provide natural light. "Every staff member has an outside view," he says. "It makes people more productive and happier."

### **Green buildings are more economical and healthier.**

Cabinetry is bamboo and wheat straw instead of particle board, which contains formaldehyde. Only non-volatile organic compound (VOC) paint and caulking were used. Carpeting is made out of recycled content in 18-inch squares with random patterns, so that if the rug is damaged, only a few panels will have to be replaced.

Carlson studied green building while in college at Ball State in Indiana but says businesses didn't start to embrace it until a few years ago. With rising energy costs and the issue of global warming now widely accepted, Carlson has become a guru of sort to others in the building profession.

He recently spoke at the Association of General Contractors spring retreat on Sanibel Island and serves on the American Institute of Architects committee on the environment. He's also on the U.S. Green Building Council. "We educate so people aren't afraid" of green building, he says. "There used to be a supply and demand problem, but that's fading away," as more manufacturers produce green products.

Carlson also used green principles to design The Children's Therapy Center, a 3,800-square-foot facility for Easter Seals of Southwest Florida, and a Wellness Community building.

"There's now the data to back up" that green buildings are more economical and healthier, he explains. "People now realize sustainability is not going to go away." ■

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