



IMAA goes green

Building made to be a friend to the environment

By Karen Rorie

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From the outside, it looks like a typical office building. But the Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association's new building is anything but ordinary. This environmentally friendly building at 2500 Valleyhigh Drive N.W. is the first in Olmsted County to be comprehensively designed and built as "green."

Kristy Arend, IMAA's development director, raised the idea of going green as soon as the organization began planning for the new building.

"In the fall of 2005 we were hearing that natural gas prices were going to triple," said Arend. "We didn't want to be held hostage by energy costs."

Going green, IMAA's leaders realized, would help them avoid spending so much of their limited budget on energy costs.

This decision allowed them to incorporate environmentally building principles into every aspect of the building. The group worked with AE Benike Construction and Yaggy Colby to design and build their new headquarters. While the building's \$1.6 million price tag may be slightly higher than a comparable one built using traditional practices, the operational costs will be lower.

"Some things cost more on the front end," said Aaron Benike, vice president of Benike Construction, "but you save money over time."

Green from the start

Planning to go green from the start also helped keep costs down, he said. "The sooner you start trying to build environmentally friendly, the less impact there is on cost."

The building is designed and constructed to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards, a rating system for green buildings. Benike, a LEED accredited professional, says that with the LEED design and building process,



Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association (IMAA) Development Director Kristy Arend shows off a foot washing area during a tour of the organization's new building. The foot washing station was built to accommodate the organization's Muslim clients, who wash their feet before their daily prayers.

"right away you start making decisions based on how you can save resources. You orient the building to capture resources and design for efficient use and function," he said.

Changes bring savings

Simple changes can result in big savings. For example, the mechanical room was moved from the northeast corner to the southwest corner of the building because utilities come on to the site from the southwest. This change made the electrical runs shorter, requiring smaller quantity of materials such as copper wiring.

IMAA's new home uses no natural gas. A geo-thermal system uses ground water to provide heating and cooling for the building, and extensive insulation and low-e glazing on the windows minimizes heat gain and loss. The windows can also be opened, so individuals can have some control over the temperature in their own office. The exterior windows are large to let in natural light, and small windows in interior walls and doors bring natural light into the center of the building.

"I haven't even turned on the overhead light in my office yet," said Arend.

The site's location on the bus line and near bike trails encourages use



Photos by Michele Jokinen/Post-Bulletin

IMAA case worker Adela Daly works in her office at the organization's new environmentally "green" building in Rochester.

of alternative transportation.

Other green features include using materials manufactured within a 500-mile radius of Rochester; using recycled materials when possible, using low-emitting paint, flooring and adhesives, including space for recycling receptacles in the building's design, minimizing exterior lighting and installing energy-efficient appliances.

In keeping with IMAA's mission to support people of all cultures, the new building includes foot-washing stations in the public restrooms and a prayer room for its Muslim clients.

IMAA plans an open house to show off its new home this fall.

Rorie is a freelance writer living in Rochester.