

Include green plan in business plan

Environmental buildings are better for people, and that's good for business, architect says

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GUELPH — There is more to being environmentally sensitive than using energy efficient light bulbs or printing on both sides of the paper.

And there's a higher purpose than saving money.

This according to J. David McAuley, a leading Guelph architect who specializes in environmentally sustainable building methods and the creation of healthy buildings.

McAuley shared some insights at a Guelph Chamber of Commerce breakfast gathering yesterday, where he said the health and well-being of people, and not the bottom line, should be the priority when businesses and households take steps toward sustainability.

"It's not money, but the human being that is the measure of all things," McAuley told an audience of about 100 business people, quoting the motto of the building biology movement that he embraces.

Buildings should be more than energy efficient, he said. They should be healthy.

McAuley said it's possible to build homes, offices, schools and public facilities that last for hundreds of years, are made from local, natural, durable and recycled materials, and consume far fewer of the planet's resources. But most new buildings going up today are made from synthetic materials, many of them toxic, he said. Most buildings fall into disrepair within 30 or 40 years.

An ever-growing number of people are becoming sick because of the buildings they live and work in, McAuley said.

"There are highly toxic materials in our homes, even in our

baby's rooms."

He encourages the use of paints and other finishes that contain no volatile organic compounds and also promotes the use of green walls — walls of plants — that clean the air.

Sustainable and healthy building practices are not widespread because very few municipalities have community energy plans or leading edge planning, he added.

"The planning of our communities is ancient," he said. "They really don't plan."

Tanya Riemann of Platypi Designs Inc. said it's important for small businesses to have an environmental policy and plan.

"I think we have guided ourselves toward being a little bit greener," she said, adding McAuley's presentation offered insights into additional measures that can be taken.

"I fear that the exposure to our sedentary environment, and being in front of monitors all day, has an effect on our health and well-being," Riemann said. "I make sure that our staff gets the appropriate time away from their desks, maybe spend some time outside so that they get a break from that impact."

Many companies are taking steps to change their environmental practices.

Lynn Vanschaik, director of sales and marketing for Delta Guelph, said the new hotel is in the process of installing a green roof, and will bring in green programs which, for example, encourage guests to ride a bike instead of drive a car when they stay at the hotel.

"We are an environmentally built hotel," she said, adding the building incorporates energy saving electrical switches and other environmentally sensitive practices.



RYAN PFEIFFER, GUELPH MERCURY

Platypi Designs Inc. strategist Tanya Riemann poses for a photo at her home office in Guelph's south end yesterday. Earlier in the day Riemann attended a Guelph Chamber of Commerce networking breakfast where architect J. David McAuley spoke about environmental design.