A Building Worthy of the Green Revolution

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Before the green building movement that USGBC helped launch roughly 20 years ago, the seeds of another profound international green movement had been planted to fundamentally transform our ability to feed the world. The Green Revolution, a term coined by former USAID Director William Gaud in 1968, has been in full force for the past seven decades, doing what the name implies – revolutionizing how we increase our global food production and therefore fighting world hunger and dramatically increasing global food security.

Yesterday in the Ben Franklin room of the State Department in Washington, DC, I attended the announcement of the winners of 2011 World Food Prize, the foremost international award recognizing the achievements of individuals who have led in improving the quality, quantity or availability of food in the world. Twenty-five years ago, the prize was inspired and created by Nobel Laureate Dr. Norman Borloug, a visionary agronomist who, through the development of more resilient varieties of wheat and other major advancements in agriculture that he promulgated to the rest of the world, is credited with saving over a billion people worldwide from starvation. Today, the Prize – considered the Nobel for agriculture – recognizes contributions in any field involved in the world food supply and security -- food and agriculture science and technology, manufacturing, marketing, nutrition, economics, poverty alleviation, political leadership and the social sciences. This year's award winners were former presidents John Agyekum Kufuor (Ghana) and Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva (Brazil), who created and implemented government policies to alleviate hunger and poverty in their countries.

Interestingly, later this year, the work of the World Food Prize Foundation and the green building movement intersect at the coordinates of a 108-year-old building in Des Moines, Iowa – what will soon be called the Dr. Norman E. Borlaug Hall of Laureates, headquarters to the Foundation. The building, originally the Beaux Arts city public library first built in 1903 in the historic downtown, is undergoing a major restoration led by the World Food Prize Foundation's President, Ambassador Kenneth Quinn, who has his sights set on achieving LEED Platinum. The $29.8 million capital project is also an example of an inspirational civic collaboration that garnered significant support from the city, the county, the state and sponsors – all dedicated to restoring this indelible city landmark, which will now serve as a museum to recognize great achievements in agriculture as well as a convocation and conference center.

"Not only will this building showcase artwork and exhibits, but the restoration of this marvelous architectural gem will also show how a building designed in the 19th century can become a terrific example of energy savings and green technology in the 21st century and beyond," said Quinn. While maintaining its historic awe and grace, the design for the building also includes some of the latest green features, including 100 geothermal wells, discreet solar panels on the roof, an 8,000 gallon rainwater cistern, and local and recycled materials. The result is the paragon of integrated design that achieves the essence of green building – a unique and market-leading incorporation of energy efficiency, water conservation, sustainable siting, environmentally friendly materials and resources, improved indoor air quality, and innovation.

"The World Food Prize emphasizes the importance of a nutritious and sustainable food supply. It only makes sense our future home should be environmentally responsible," said John Ruan III, World Food Prize Chairman.

Indeed, this restored historic building and headquarters for the World Food Prize Foundation will be a shining example of green building excellence and worthy of the work the Foundation is doing to address the global challenges of food production and security. Dr. Borlaug, often called the father of the Green Revolution, would be proud.

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