

20 years of USGBC: Pioneers on the path

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This article is part of a series of stories from USGBC's community celebrating 20 years of green building triumphs. Take a walk down memory lane with USGBC, as we reflect on favorite moments and share memories from the last 20 years. Share your own green building triumphs using #USGBC20.

As a 10-year old, mortified as my mother chased the ChemLawn people down the street and complained consistently about having to wash and reuse plastic bags, I never envisioned that my career would lead me to the green side. But at 34, I knew it was my destiny when Tom Eichbaum, Principal of Smith Group, Inc., asked me to lead the interview for a new headquarters for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation (CBF). I immediately thought of my mother, who passed in 1990, but was a big supporter of the non-profit organization dedicated to Saving the Bay! Her ideas had already helped me escape the 1990's recession by finishing my indoctrination into green architecture, a 17-building training center for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service on 500-acers in Shepherdstown, West Virginia. It was now 1997 and while building green was far from many architects' minds, I knew it was all I wanted to do. CBF was the perfect client, dedicated to "walking their talk", with the perfect site adjacent to the subject of their mission.

After being selected, the Foundation took us on a tour of their outposts on the Bay including Fox Island. We arrived at Fox, as we did many of their sites, by boat, but I was mystified when we docked at the old fishing retreat building on stilts surrounded by water. Where was the land? This was truly an inconvenient truth of sea level rise.

Photo by Dave Hartcorn (via [Chesapeake Bay Foundation](#))

Our design solution was influenced by many firsthand impressions and stories offered by CBF staff and the Bay itself. The final design, also perched on stilts, sits on the edge of the Bay in the picturesque residential neighborhood near Annapolis, Maryland. The project's success was the result of wise team members like Mary Todd Winchester, Chuck Foster, Janet Harrison, Greg Mella, Cindy Cogil, and Don Posson. We convened a peer review by Gail Lindsey, Greg Franta, and Bill Reed who introduced us to a checklist they called LEED. CBF loved the idea of having a way to verify the work of their design team through a 3rd party system. The Philip Merrill Environmental Center became the 1st LEED Platinum certified building gaining national and international recognition and kick-starting the adoption of LEED in faraway places such as India!

Photo by Nikki Davis (via [Chesapeake Bay Foundation](#))

India? After touring several green buildings in the U.S., renowned Indian architect Karan Grover was smitten with the vernacular design of CBF's headquarters. In 2000, he found me working for the U.S. Green Building Council and asked council board member, Kath Williams, and I to consult on India's 1st LEED Platinum building and speak with leaders that were already interested in LEED through President Clinton's visits to India. Several trips to India seeded my passion for international application of greening policies and my dream of going green globally. In 2002, my dream came true, Patrick Collins, Chief Architect for the Department of State asked me to lead the greening of our U.S. embassies and consulates. Today, we have 17 LEED Certified embassies and consulates with another 30 registered. We are building a firmer foundation for eco-diplomacy through the internationally recognized LEED language.

Those early opportunities coupled with the mentorship of wise, founders of the LEED rating system like Penny Bonda, Tom Paladino, Bill Browning, and Rob Watson prepared me for the leadership position I have today. But, in the end, I think I just have green genes. My mother was a woman before her time and I

Watson prepared me for the leadership position I have today. But, in the end, I think I just have green genes. My mother was a woman before her time and I often thought of her as a pioneer on many fronts. I am forever grateful to continue in her footsteps and be surrounded and inspired by so many other pioneers on the path.

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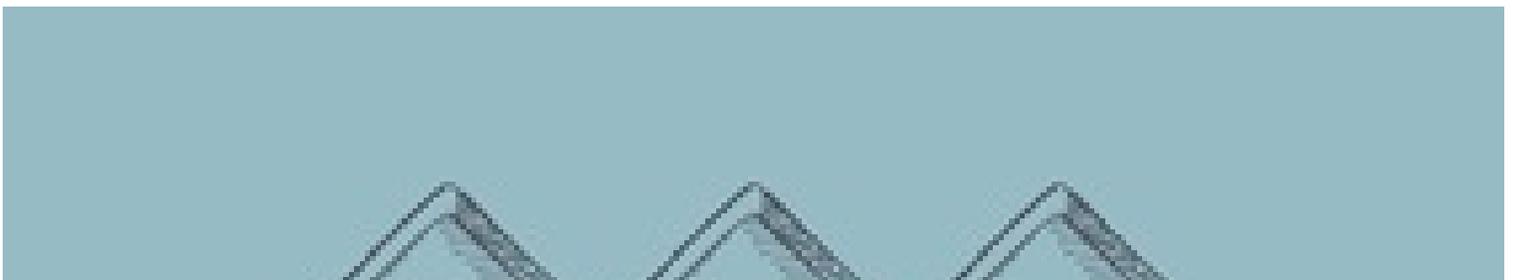


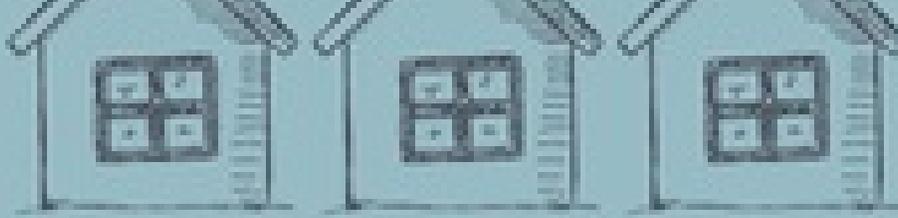
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