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If You Build It… Will They Come?

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David Miller, Tony Bansal, Barbara Saperstone, Jaime Van Mourik, Rizwan Rahan, Rob Johnson & Dan Wells stand in front of CA bldg

Earth Day has been around my whole life.

This year, we celebrated 43 years to the day from the first one, April 22, 1970. What's changed? And is anything better?

Sure, we recycle and more people drive increasingly efficient cars or use public transportation. We buy CFL and LED bulbs and wait for the day that LED bulbs are cheaper. We compost, we garden, we buy local or organic food and we educate about human environmental impacts. But there are more and more people making more and more impact. So what are we to do, and even if we did all of these things, do they really make a difference?

This is the first year I can say I'm working to do what I hope Gaylord Nelson and Denis Hayes intended when they started this in 1970.

As the first environmental sustainability officer for Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), I'm working to reduce our college's carbon footprint using the gamut of sustainability ideas, initiatives and projects. One of those is promoting the U.S. Green Building Council's (USGBC) Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) efforts to reduce the energy usage of buildings. By designing in efficiency and using energy-reducing materials and technologies, buildings can be built to use less energy. To maximize this energy reduction, I'm building relationships within the college and externally to influence the behavior of the buildings' users. Without efficient operation, the buildings themselves can only do so much.

At our college's recent green festival, we had the opportunity to promote our first LEED building and have Jamie Van Mourik, USGBC's Director of higher education, present the LEED plaque to the campus provost, Dr. Barbara Saperstone, and the college's Director of Facilities Mr. Bill Chamberlin. While the plaque itself represents the end of this certification process, it signals the beginning of the College's journey along an environmentally sustainable path. Other buildings across the college are in the process of LEED certification and are tangible steps we are taking to reduce its environmental impact and teach future generations about environmentally friendly design and building, to include my hiring last October.

As part of the education effort, USGBC's Community Green program specifically targets community colleges to expand LEED education. This program intends to leverage community colleges as premium incubators of academic education, skills training, and hands-on experience to build the future workforce. As a charter member of the program, NOVA is poised to be a leader in green building education in Northern Virginia both for buildings being built and providing LEED education and certification opportunities for the future workforce.

As we become more aware of our environmental impact and realize that the built environment is one place we can make changes to reduce our impact, the demand will continue to increase for efficiency education and training and how to design buildings that have smaller environmental footprints.

So my answer to the opening question, "If you build it…will they come?" is **yes**, mainly because it will eventually be the only way to build things and any other way will become anathema, and on this Earth Day, NOVA is joining the ranks of higher education in pursuing and promoting energy efficiency education, design, and building to reduce its environmental impact.

The postings on this site are my own and do not necessarily represent NOVA's positions, strategies or opinions.

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  Robert Johnson made 1 contribution in the last 6 months

Robert Johnson

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