

# Green buildings popular, but LEED projects stall

Many developers unwilling to pay administrative costs and navigate bureaucratic red tape to achieve LEED certification

By Glen Korstrom

**BC** tradespeople have a new place to learn sustainable building techniques just as the annual number of new LEED-certified projects appears to be plateauing.

**Okanagan College** launched its new centre of excellence this month. Built to the highest sustainability standards, the Penticton centre will be used to train tradespeople in sustainable building techniques such as geothermal engineering and how to install efficient heating and ventilation systems, which are key to securing LEED (leadership in energy and environmental design) designation.

The number of new LEED-certified projects worldwide has grown substantially each year for the past decade, according to statistics that the **U.S. Green Building Council** provided to *Business in Vancouver* last week.

Much slower growth is expected this year for both LEED-certified and LEED-registered projects. However, given the global economic slowdown since late 2008, any growth is impressive.

Meanwhile, the **U.S. Green Building Council** (USGBC) and affiliate organizations such as the **Canadian Green Building Council** (CGBC) can take three years to verify eligibility and grant a project LEED certification. That slows the growth of the LEED building sector because developers and building owners are reluctant to spend extra money on the bureaucracy to verify that a building merits LEED certification.

"People want a sustainable building and they want to do it for the right reasons, but they're not necessarily worried about proving it," said **Tim McLennan**, who is a principal at **CEI Architecture Planning Interiors**, which designed the Okanagan College's centre of excellence.

His firm specializes in designing green buildings. The final two buildings in **Tonko Realty**



LEED role: Mountain Equipment Co-op aiming to have its future store in North Vancouver LEED certified

**Advisors Ltd.**'s Willingdon Park development are among its recent projects.

"The industry has come a long way," McLennan said. "It used to be a premium in cost to build a LEED building because of the [techniques and materials required]. Those have become so mainstream that the cost is now just in the certification process."

**Beedie Group** executives do cost-benefit analyses on all aspects of projects. They calculated a few years ago that it would have cost \$300,000 to have the CGBC certify that one of its projects, **Re-**

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**frigerative Supply**'s building in Burnaby, meets LEED standards.

"We've never had a client who has wanted to incur the cost to get LEED certification when there's many things that they can use that money for in the construction process to have a more green and energy-efficient building," said **Beth Harrington**, the Beedie Group's manager of

industrial development.

Obtaining LEED certification, however, has marketing advantages, particularly for companies such as **Starbucks Corp.** (Nasdaq:SBUX) and **Mountain Equipment Co-op** (MEC) that have invested millions of dollars to integrate sustainability into their corporate brand image.

Starbucks earlier this year issued a press release trumpeting the opening of Vancouver's first LEED-registered Starbucks at the corner of West Hastings and Howe streets.

The location, however, is not LEED-certified.

According to USGBC communications manager **Ashley Katz**, being LEED-registered simply means that Starbucks has paid a fee to the USGBC and has agreed to start the process to become LEED-certified.

Meanwhile, **Ventana Construction** is building a new store for MEC in North Vancouver that's slated to open in April 2012.

MEC has no corporate policy mandating that all new stores and its future headquarters on the False Creek Flats be LEED-certified.

Instead, **Stuart Kernaghan**, Ventana's marketing and communications manager, said MEC views LEED certification as a byproduct of focusing on having the most environmentally sustainable building possible. ■  
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