

MISSISSIPPI BUSINESS JOURNAL

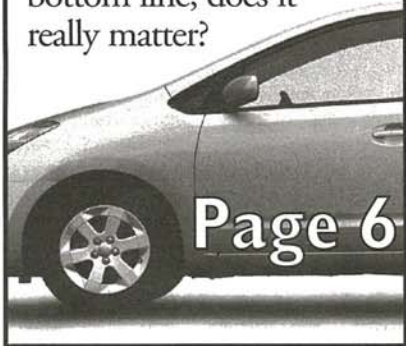
Mississippi's Essential Source for Business News since 1979

June 15-21, 2009 • Vol. 31, No. 24 • \$2 • 40 pages

Prius or no Prius?

When it comes to the bottom line, does it really matter?

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LEGISLATURE

BELATED BUDGET

Agencies cannot make plans for upcoming year

By CLAY CHANDLER
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With the beginning of fiscal year 2010 just over two weeks away, Mississippi state agencies are still without a budget, leaving them to build a financial plan without a blueprint.

House and Senate budget negotiators were unable to reach an agreement before the on-again, off-again 2009 regular session ended

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LEED v3

New certification system offers many changes

The lobby of AERC's new LEED Gold certified facility shows the results of the extensive planning and work done by the firm's staff.

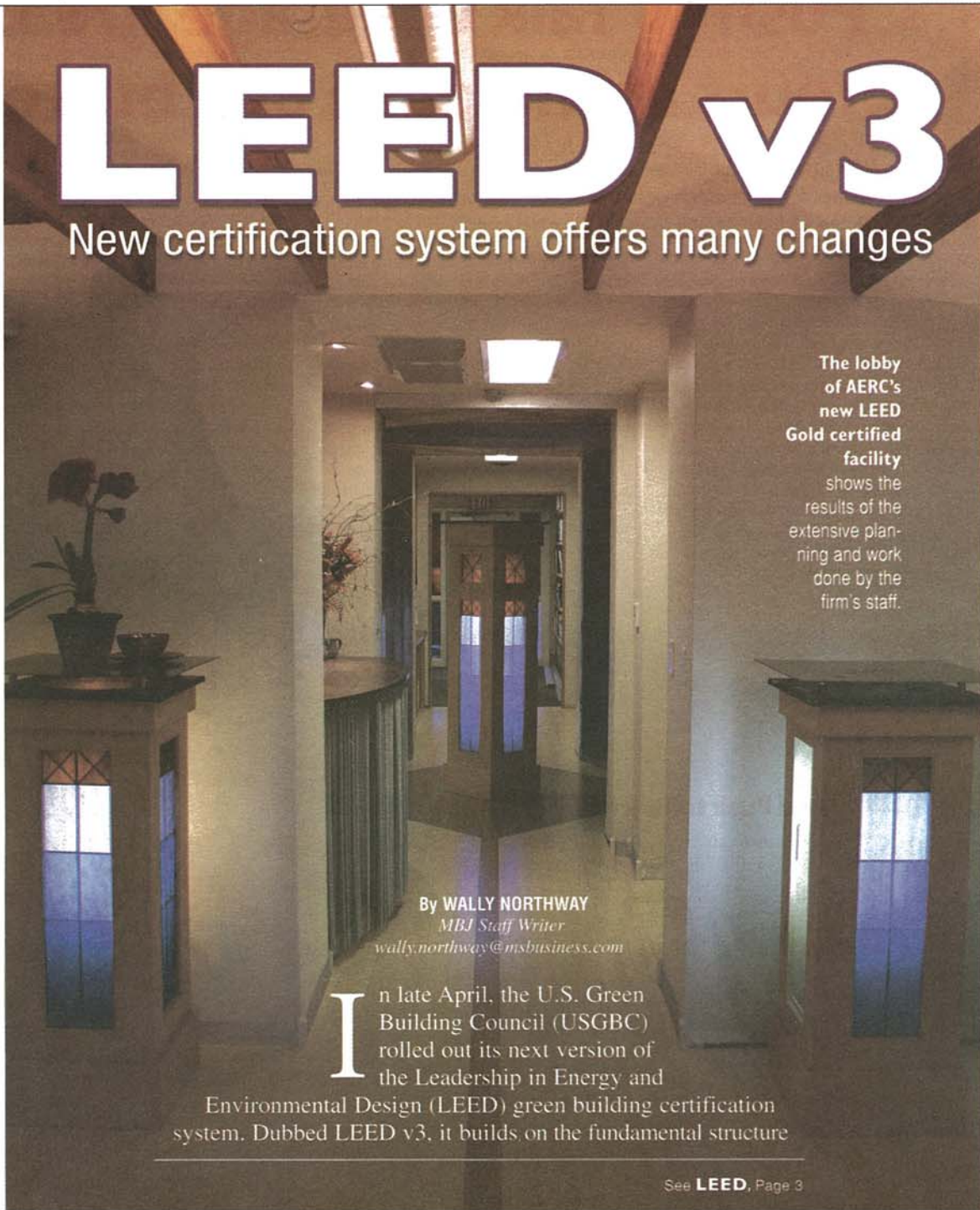
By WALLY NORTHWAY

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In late April, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) rolled out its next version of the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) green building certification system. Dubbed LEED v3, it builds on the fundamental structure

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LEED

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and familiarity of the existing rating system (LEED v2.2) while incorporating new technology and addressing priorities such as energy usage and CO2 emissions.

LEED v3 is so new that many architects are still unfamiliar with it. One Mississippi architect, Doug Thornton, AIA, LEED AP, partner with AERC, PLLC, in Hernando, did a little studying and offered an overview of LEED v3's most significant offerings. And, he is a good source — not only is he LEED certified, AERC's facility is LEED Gold certified, as well.

Earning credit

One of the changes that Thornton views as significant is the new point system and the weighting of credits. One of the criticisms of the old rating system was that it gave too many points for some green elements while not giving enough for others. Instead of a 69-point system, LEED v3 utilizes a 100-point system that Thornton says is easier to understand. It gives more credit for energy-efficiency, CO2 reduction and water conservation.

Region sweet region

Another notable addition is LEED v3's

regional approach. Different regions have different priorities. LEED v3 offers points for meeting priorities unique to specific areas of the country. These are, in essence, bonus points — points in addition to the aforementioned weighted credits.

Here in the Magnolia State, bonus points can be earned for sustainable sites, brownfield remediation, site selection, energy/atmosphere (credit for a 15 percent increase in optimal energy performance), water efficiency (credit for 40 percent reduction in water usage for landscaping) and indoor air quality (credit for individual controls of thermostats and lights).

User friendly

One of the more welcome changes to Thornton is the improvement to LEED Online. When AERC was going through the process of building its green headquarters, Thornton found LEED Online not difficult, but a little cumbersome. It sounds like a trivial issue, but considering the hoops AERC had to jump through to earn Gold certification, a clunky web site was just another problem.

Thornton said he finds the new LEED Online much easier to navigate, and just as importantly, upload times are much quicker.

Pioneering and learning

Thornton listed several other changes, and generally gave the new system a

thumbs-up. In fact, he admits that LEED v3 would have made AERC's Gold certification process a little easier.

"We barely made the Gold certification standards," he said. "I think with LEED v3, we would have a little more cushion."

In April 2002, Thornton, a Mississippi State University alumnus, established AERC (Architectural & Engineering Resources for Construction). As the name suggests, the firm was established to be a primary, single-source resource for our clients' building needs. Shortly after the firm's opening, David Hale, PE, a civil engineer, joined AERC as a partner to help achieve this goal.

The firm's first office space was in the Pinnacle Center, designed by AERC, and located in Southaven. The firm would spend the next six years in Southaven, gaining a solid reputation for master planning services and church, educational, medical, commercial and other projects.

In November 2007, AERC started on its now LEED Gold certified facility in downtown Hernando. Thornton said he is conservative, and was skeptical about the whole LEED process. The renovation was really more of an experiment to prove, or disprove, the validity and applicability of sustainable design in AERC's market.

The small, residential-scaled office building the firm purchased needed systems upgrades and finish updates anyway, so AERC decided to go for LEED

Gold Certification.

Once again, AERC wanted to use its project as a learning experience. Thus, the firm handled demolition and material sorting in house.

"We wanted to learn the hardship of it so we could explain it to contractors," Thornton said.

It certainly was not easy. One hurdle was availability of green construction materials. AERC could not find many of these products, and resorted to the Internet. Thornton said one positive he sees now is that many of those products are now readily available at home improvement stores everywhere.

In March 2008, AERC moved into its new building, and Thornton certainly has no regrets.

"In short, I became a convert to the green design movement due to the results of this process," he said. "The cost to 'go green' was less than expected (and they have come down since), the design process was not difficult (once we did the initial research), online LEED documentation was not difficult (once we understood the process), the resulting indoor air quality and work environment is outstanding (the best I have experienced) and our utility costs are tracking 22 percent less than the previous owner's utility cost."

For more on AERC and the planning and work the firm did on its new facility, visit www.aercpllc.com.