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Aerzen USA goes green

By GRETCHEN METZ



Staff photos by Larry McDevitt

SADSBURY — No big, bad wolf is going to huff and puff and blow this straw house down — its planning has been well thought-out.

At a cost of \$5 million-plus, Aerzen USA is building a new 41,000-square-foot “green” manufacturing plant at 108 Independence Way.

The building features walls insulated with bales of straw, a roof where hardy plants will grow, a meadow instead of a lawn, a parking lot where rain water can funnel through the surface into a holding basin and seep back into the ground, and windows that let in winter sun but are shielded from summer rays.

There are “green” office buildings, hospitals, schools and some homes, but Jeff Hammond, the Aerzen engineer who heads the company’s building team, believes this will be the first

LEED-certified manufacturing building in Pennsylvania.

“Manufacturing buildings are usually the dumbest, cheapest buildings,” Hammond said. “But we set out to build a building where our workers would be comfortable, a building that would be sustainable, a world-class facility to do the work that we do.”

The wholly owned division of the German manufacturer Aerzener Maschinenfabrik assembles industrial blowers and compressors for the U.S. market. The company has been in the U.S. since 1983 and is currently located in the Highlands Corporate Center in Valley where it employs 30 people.

The U.S. Green Building Council certified Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, Green Building Rating System is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high-performance green buildings.

There are currently 1,097 LEED certified commercial projects worldwide, according to the Washington, D.C., council’s Web site.

Hammond said the company expects to complete construction in early November and start moving in by the middle of that month. The building will be certified LEED Gold, one level below LEED Platinum, the highest certification.

The structure itself is made using renewable materials and recycled materials.

Floors, for example, are made of a composite of recycled glass that will be ground to a smooth, shiny surface.

Support beams in the office end of the building are made from wood byproducts.

Hammond said the original plan to cover the beams made of pressed wood chips and scraps was changed because the company likes the beams' rough look. So instead, the support beams will be left open and get a coat of wood stain. The beams in the ceiling will get the same treatment.

"Less is more," Hammond said.

While most rooms will be open to natural light, the restrooms are an exception.

To bring natural light in, restrooms will have a Solatube Daylight System installed in the ceiling that captures sunlight through a dome on the roof and channels it down through an internal reflective system.

At the ceiling level, a diffuser that resembles a recessed light fixture spreads the light evenly throughout the room.

The straw bales that insulate the building's conference room and foyer are covered with a plastic mesh to hold plaster in place.

The end product has a "pleasantly lumpy" finish, Hammond said.

The straw was purchased from a local farmer and the clay used in the interior plaster came from the soil on site, Hammond said, adding that most of the materials used in the building came from a 500-mile radius, also a LEED requirement.

The space where manufacturing is done is positioned to capture the breeze from the southwest in the summer. Fans with 24-foot blades will circulate the breezes as well as the air brought in through underground ductwork .

The end result will be free air conditioning every summer, Hammond said.

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