

August 11, 2010

DEALS & DEALMAKERS

REAL ESTATE WEEKLY

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 11, 2010 B1

More city buildings are getting the green glove treatment

By LIANA GREY

In the lobby of the Visionaire, a LEED Platinum condominium tower in Battery Park City, members of the management team monitor an exhaustive list of energy-efficient technologies on sleek computer screens.

A click of the mouse assures everyone, from security guards to maintenance staff, that the building's rooftop solar panels are functioning smoothly, its micro-turbine is heating up showers in all 252 units, and that the waste water treatment plant in the basement is pumping clean water into residents' toilets.

As an added measure, crews physically inspect the systems up to four times a day.

Michael Gubbins, vice president and director of residential management for the development firm Albanese Organization, can access the system remotely on his BlackBerry. "Total monitoring is important," said Gubbins, who helped oversee the construction of some of the city's first green residences.

Once a building has earned LEED certification or an Energy Star rating, the key to minimizing long-term carbon emissions is proper maintenance. That includes

training staff to operate green technology, or outsourcing upkeep to eco-conscious building services firms.

The management team at Alexan CityView, an eco-conscious rental complex in Bayonne, New Jersey, does both.

"We did an initial training for our staff," said Brian Gretkoski, regional operating manager for Kettler, a national development firm. Maintenance crews regularly inspect green features like an energy efficient ventilation system, which helped the 544-unit building secure the status of largest LEED-certified residential community in the country.

"They make sure the air filtration system continues to cycle cool air," said Gretkoski. "They're looking to make sure ducts are clean of dust."

Green maintenance isn't a necessity for LEED certification, Gretkoski added, but "it's something we're all very conscious of doing."

Recently, Kettler hired Planned Companies, a building services provider in Parsippany, New Jersey, to scrub



the Alexan's hallways and amenities spaces with low-VOC cleaning products.

The 112-year-old cleaning company's portfolio is currently 95% green, said CEO Rob Francis, and includes high-profile commercial clients like the historic Puck Building in SoHo, the auction house Sotheby's, and East River Plaza, a new retail center in East Harlem.

"In the beginning of 2008, we started getting into the green movement," said Francis, who is LEED accredited along with other Planned Companies executives, and advises clients on overall

energy efficiency strategy. "Clients were talking about it, trade organizations were mentioning it."

Convinced that sustainability was more than just a fad, the company swapped out conventional cleaning solutions for "non-toxic, biodegradable products, which are better for the air our associates breathe and for surfaces being cleaned," said Francis.

For these reasons, green cleaning earns developments LEED points. And that goes beyond non-toxic chemicals. "One point is having entryway mats that collect dust," Francis added. Installing the

energy efficiency strategy. "Clients were talking about it, trade organizations were mentioning it."

Thanks to the smooth day-to-day operations of all the building's green features — from motion-sensing lights in the hallways to a rainwater irrigation system to elevators that produce energy upon descent — the Visionaire remains as efficient as it was when it first opened two years ago, using 40% less electricity and 55% less water than typical residences, Gubbins said.

To help developments around the city achieve similar results, Gubbins spearheaded a sustainability training program, called 1,000 Supers, in conjunction with a local union and the Green Building Council. As part of their benefits

package, operations staff at the Visionaire can enroll in the initiative's courses, including a 40-hour core class that covers everything from insulation to water conservation.

"When it comes down to it, education is important," said Gubbins. "If I give you a hybrid and you drive it at 90 miles per hour, there's no point."

At the Riverhouse, another Battery Park City condominium with a focus on energy efficiency, building engineer Marc Blom took advantage of a union-sponsored education program to brush up on his sustainability knowledge.

He learned how to manage the 320-unit building's energy-efficient apparatuses — including a waste water treatment plant, rainwater irrigation system, and cogeneration plant — as he went along, relying largely on an automated monitoring system similar to the Visionaire's. If a malfunction occurs in the rooftop solar panels, which are programmed to track the sun at set intervals, Blom is notified by an alarm — and the internet.

"There is a web access system," Blom said. "We can see what each set of inverters are doing, so if nothing's happening we know there's a

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problem." The same system is utilized at both the Mets and Yankee stadiums, where Alliance Building Services is in charge of general maintenance. Cleaning crews from ABS affiliate, First Quality Maintenance use Certified Green Seal products and tools to create a healthy, safe and productive working environment, from reducing waste to replacing toxic products with natural ones.

They use eco-friendly cleaning products and methods that include using Green Seal products, recycled paper, waste-reducing

dispensers and high-quality janitorial equipment.

At Yankee Stadium restrooms have soap that doesn't need water and recycled paper rather than non-biodegradable plastic cups are used by vendors. The stadium has recycled over 8,879 gallons of cooking oil into biofuel and, to save paper, maintenance and operations manuals can only be accessed electronically.

According to the Major League Baseball Association, the sustainable efforts of the Yankees are the equivalent of taking more than 4,700 passenger cars off the road for a year.