



Home > Indicator Reports > Charting The Course > FAU wins federal certification for 'green' nursing building

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by Scott Travis

It's no accident that Florida Atlantic University's first green building serves as a training ground for nurses.

The philosophy of the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing focuses on caring, and that includes promoting health and sustainability, Dean Ann Boykin said.

"We decided as nurses, it's our responsibility to demonstrate we could build a healthy, healing space in a public university," she said.

The healthy design, using recycled and low-toxicity materials, has earned the nursing building the distinction of being the first structure in South Florida to receive the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. The building received gold certification, the second-highest possible. Other rankings are platinum, the highest; silver, the third highest; and certified, the fourth highest. No South Florida school has received any level of certification.

But even more important to the College of Nursing are the personal benefits to the green design, Boykin said. She and other employees had lung problems when they were in an older building, but they have cleared up, she said.

The \$16.6 million structure, which opened in 2005, contains many green features designed by Schenkel-Shultz Architecture and TLC Engineering, both based in Orlando. Rooms are outfitted with sensors to turn off lights when empty and adjust the air conditioning when fewer people are around.

Wood floors are bamboo because it regrows quickly. Paint, furniture and carpet are low on chemicals and high on recycled content. The roof is reflective and the windows glazed to let in light but not heat. Outdoor lamps are trained to avoid filling the night sky with too much distracting light.

Restrooms use waterless urinals and low-flow faucets, and there are showers inside and bike racks outside to encourage people not to drive. Or if you do, bring a hybrid, and plug it into the electric car-charging station outside.

The 75,000-square-foot building has a natural and peaceful feel to it. Its interior design is feng shui, a Chinese practice of arranging space to achieve environmental harmony. The walls are colored with earth tones of green, gray and terra cotta.

- [Home](#)
- [Hot Topics](#)
- [Indicators Reports](#)
- [Indicators Data](#)
- [Florida's Regions](#)
- [News Articles](#)
- [Research Reports](#)
- [Events](#)
- [About SOFLO.org](#)
- [Charting The Course Survey](#)



A cylinder atrium provides natural light. There are plenty of places that can be used for meditation and self-renewal, Boykin said, including a labyrinth in an outdoor courtyard and a small indoor "sacred room."

"The building is breathtaking. Very peaceful," said Peggy Toussaint, a nursing graduate student from Hollywood.

FAU is expected to become greener in the future.

Every publicly funded facility on campus will be designed to meet the building council's standards, University President Frank Brogan said.

Building green costs about 1 percent to 5 percent more initially, but that's more than made up in reduced operating costs, said Tom Donaudy, FAU's vice president for planning. He said the cooling system for the Lynn building, which uses water, is about half the cost of air-cooled systems.

Christine Lynn, who donated \$10 million to the College of Nursing, now has her name on two green buildings in the state. The Eugene M. and Christine Lynn Business Center at Stetson University in DeLand became the first LEED certified building in the state in 2002. Lynn said she never pushed for Earth-friendly architecture, but she's glad to see her buildings recognized.

"We're seeing how green buildings really work with energy efficiency," she said. "It's the way to go."

There are 22 LEED certified buildings in Florida. While the nursing building is the first in South Florida, others will be following, said Olga Alvarez, Broward County program chairwoman for the U.S. Green Building Council. The South Regional/ Broward Community College Library in Pembroke Pines will be certified soon, she said.

Florida had 115 projects seeking LEED certification from 2001 to 2006. But from August 2006 to August 2007, that number has skyrocketed to 268, with many of those from South Florida, she said.

"People in South Florida have finally seen the light," Alvarez said.