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Syracuse lacks green buildings

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TIM KNAUSS
REAL ESTATE NOTEBOOK

The nation's leading advocate for environmentally friendly buildings would like to see more progress in his hometown.

"When are we going to get Syracuse engaged here?" asks Rick Fedrizzi, president and chief executive officer of the U.S. Green Building Council in Washington, D.C.

Fedrizzi, a former Carrier Corp. executive who started a consulting firm in Syracuse in 2001, helped found the council in 1993. Five months ago, he was asked to take over as the full-time president and CEO.

His travels since then have brought home to him how vigorously some communities push to get buildings certified under the council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program.

LEED sets standards to judge a building's efficiency, healthiness and environmental impact. Buildings that meet the minimum standard can be certified; those that push higher can be rated silver, gold or platinum.

"I got home yesterday morning from Seattle," Fedrizzi said last week in Syracuse. "And Seattle has an inverse proportion of green buildings to conventional buildings. You walk around Seattle and it's like, oh, there's LEED silver, LEED gold, LEED platinum, LEED silver, gold, gold, gold. It's just amazing."

In Syracuse, there are no certified green buildings. That bothers Fedrizzi, who said the first LEED buildings will raise awareness and build experience among professionals who work on them.

Three local building projects have registered with the council to seek LEED certification, but have not yet finished the process: Roxboro Road Middle

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School in Mattydale; Hanlon Pool in East Syracuse; and East Area Family YMCA in Fayetteville.

Officials at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry also have said they intend to seek LEED status when they renovate Baker Laboratory.

Fedrizzi said the 2002 renovation of Rosamond Gifford Zoo in Syracuse was a fine example of green building and would certainly merit LEED certification. But county officials never pursued the paperwork, which costs money. Consultants must document dozens of details, from the composition of carpets to the operation of the heating system.

Fedrizzi said he did not know what it would cost to get the zoo certified, but he said he thought it would be money well spent.

"It's a way of having a rallying point for the city," he said.

Martin Farrell, speaking for the county executive, disagreed.

"We're just happy that we did the right thing and built a green building to set an example," he said. "As far as the certification, you know, just to hang a certificate on the wall might not be the best expenditure of the public's money."

Fedrizzi holds out hope that the Syracuse Center of Excellence in Environmental and Energy Systems, scheduled to be built at Water and Almond streets, will seek the highest LEED rating: platinum.

And then there's Destiny USA, proposed to be the world's largest green building, and for which Fedrizzi has been a consultant.

"I am going to be absolutely keeping the faith on the Destiny USA project," Fedrizzi said.

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