

To the Edge and Back

>> BY TOMMY LINSTROTH, LEED AP

I can't speak for everybody, but I know a vast majority of the people I talk to say, "thank goodness 2009 is over." It has been a rough 18 months for most of us in the building industry, but if you believe the analysts, at least things are supposed to get better in 2010. I sure hope so.

What has been refreshing to see is that even in these challenging times, the prevalence of green building has continued to grow. It certainly has been a buyer's market, with new tenants in control of lease negotiations and current tenants asking for concessions. But as building owners and managers scrambled to cut costs, hold onto existing tenants, and maybe even find a few new ones, they realized greening their facility could help on all three fronts. While I noticed attendance at some of the annual conferences around the country was down this year, it was refreshing to see the continued interest and dialogue on sustainability. You even had some of the largest property management companies in the country committing to taking entire portfolios through the LEED-EB process. That certainly bodes well for the future and for the rest of us.

There has also been (and may continue to be) a large cash infusion of government dollars as part of the stimulus package geared toward greening existing buildings. From energy retrofits to renewable energy systems, there's been more money dedicated to increasing building performance on both the public and private sides than there has ever been. As I write this, I just finished reading through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program that will dump a half-billion dollars into efficiency retrofit projects. These types of investments will help spur more innovative efficiency solutions which will be widely transferable across industry sectors.

The other slight positive to come from this giant economic mess? It has driven costs to be more competitive in our industry. We're able to do more building improvements with fewer dollars due to the highly competitive business environment. For those with capital to invest, now is the time to do so. When you factor in



the growing incentives for energy efficiency and renewables, the latter half of 2009 has been one of the best times to invest in green technologies for your building than any other time in history.

It can be hard finding positives in light of businesses downsizing, buildings sitting vacant and much development on hold. But what is comforting is that those who come out of this in 2010 are doing so in a different environment — one that is leaner and, fortunately, greener than it was in the past.

Sometimes you have to be at the brink of disaster before you figure out the right path forward. I believe that many of us have been to the edge and quickly determined that a greener, more sustainably built environment leaves us better suited

for long-term stability and profitability. These sure are interesting times we've all been living through. If some of these trends continue, next year could very well shape up to be the greenest year in modern history for the U.S. — a defining year that we'll look back upon decades from now. Either way, I've got to say, I sure am looking forward to 2010. **SF**



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