

Pinal shopping center may make 'green' history

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A Mesa-based developer is trying to show Pinal County that green is the new black - green building, that is.

C.I. Development Group is the company behind San Tan Commons, a planned environmentally friendly shopping center that could become one of the first LEED Platinum-rated neighborhood retail centers in the state and the nation.

Planned along Hunt Highway near Valley View Road, what might have been a typical strip mall with nail salons, restaurants and offices could make green history in Pinal County.

The building will boast several environmentally friendly features, including solar panels, double-paneled glass and skylights that could reduce energy bills by 15 to 17 percent, said Jason Savell, a principal at C.I. Development Group.

LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. It is the rating system the United States Green Building Council uses to assess the environmental sustainability and efficiency of developments.

Platinum is the highest LEED rating a building can earn, but many don't capture the distinction because developers fear building green will mean spending more green.

"Most of them (platinum-rated buildings) are from municipalities, universities or mega corporations, where money was never an issue," Savell said. "But it's never a place we could go to in the course of everyday lives."

San Tan Commons could be home to the neighborhood pizza parlor or the family dentist, and all of them could be doing business in a green building. C.I. Development wanted to build a platinum-rated shopping center hoping to make the practice more mainstream and show other developers that it can be done without breaking the bank, Savell said. Lease rates for tenants are also expected to pace the cost of traditional, non-green buildings.

"We wanted to bring this building to everyday living," Savell said. "You can do a green building at a fairly high level of certification without a substantial cost difference. What it requires is you re-examine the planning process and really start the planning early."

Savell and his partner Eric Faas started C.I. Development group in 2006. The company specializes in building LEED Gold and Platinum retail, office and mixed-used developments. The company is also working on a shopping center in Surprise called M Square and the San Tan Medical Complex along Hunt Highway. Like San Tan Commons, M Square is expected to receive a platinum rating. The San Tan Medical Complex is expected to earn a gold rating.

Although green building is becoming more popular in Arizona, the number of green developments rising isn't enough to keep pace with the state's rapid growth, said Mick Dalrymple, owner of a.k.a. Green, an eco-friendly building supply store in Scottsdale.

"It's still a challenge to build green," Dalrymple said, "but it's not that much harder to do better."

He said once developers, planners and builders get over the learning curve of what it takes to go green, becoming more environmentally aware doesn't have to result in a huge difference in cost or labor over traditional building methods.

Arizona has "an economy that is overly dependent on development," Dalrymple said. "Some people just want to make a fast buck in development and are not thinking about the long-term consequences and health of our environment."

Projects like San Tan Commons that bring green ethics into everyday life are important to increasing awareness to environmental issues.

"People need to realize that we're in a war to save the planet," Dalrymple said. "With buildings consuming 40 percent of energy in the country, buildings are one of the fronts we need to fight this war."