

# THE REAL VALUE OF LEED

While it's tough to quantify, many say working in a sustainable office building increases productivity

MELANIE TURNER | STAFF WRITER

When it comes to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified office buildings, benefits such as energy and water savings can be measured.

But gains in employee productivity and health are tough to quantify — or even prove.

It's a developing debate over the benefits of a LEED-certified building.

Still, companies in Sacramento-area LEED Gold buildings — who enjoy particle-free air and lots of daylight — say employee productivity improves. Some swear by natural light, others by the cutting-edge heating and air conditioning system.

"It really feels like more of a home-type environment," said Greg Johnson, a partner with the Sacramento office of Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman LLP. "The work doesn't seem to be quite as strenuous and you don't dread, necessarily, coming to work as some people tend to do."

After 17 years at 400 Capitol Mall, Pillsbury moved in February to a LEED Gold building in midtown at 2600 Capitol Ave. The 35-employee firm has about 14,300 square feet on the third floor.

The firm, which prides itself on a long tradition of sustainability, is now seeking LEED certification

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chief operating officer,  
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Laboratory Corp.

"I used to think about air conditioning daily because someone was either coming in my office trying to crank it up or crank it down," he said. "I think I underestimated the significance of LEED certification when we started this. Now ... it has added to my satisfaction with the space."

Pillsbury partner John Poulos said he's not sure if he's more productive in the new space.

But "it makes it more enjoyable to come to work," he said. "To that extent, I'd say ... it makes me more productive."

Poulos added that the LEED certification also helps with recruiting bright, young lawyers. And it gives the firm credibility with clients, who see the firm as "walking the walk."

#### 'AHEAD OF THE GAME'

Adam Hansel, chief operating officer for Digital Technology Laboratory Corp. in Davis, said that while it's "very difficult to put a metric on that," he believes employees in LEED Gold buildings are more productive.

DTL provides software and mechanical engineering services to its parent company, Mori Seiki Co. in Nara, Japan. Mori Seiki is one of the world's largest manufacturers of machine tools.

DTL's 71,000-square-foot building, developed by Capital Partners Development Co. LLC, was the first in Yolo County to



Deb Johanson Cook, above, is hard at work while Carrie Bonnington, left, and Amanda Alley take a break at the law office of Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman at 2600 Capitol Ave., a LEED Gold-certified building.

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achieve a LEED Gold rating.

"I think people take pride in being able to tell people that," Hansel said.

Among the building's environmentally friendly features is a 172-kilowatt photovoltaic system that could supply as much as half of DTL's power.

In attempting to describe why he believes

employees are more productive, Hansel said "it's an intangible."

He points to a number of features he believes contribute to employee comfort — and productivity. While some might argue that it's more comfortable because it's new, he said, he cited the natural light and the fresh, filtered air as features that

are unique to LEED buildings and enable employees to "focus more on their work," he said.

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Developed by the U.S. Green Building Council, LEED certification is recognized worldwide as the standard for measuring building sustainability. It promotes the efficient use of energy and minimal environmental impact.

The process of helping to design the space, including picking out paint samples and tile squares, empowered the Pillsbury staff and boosted morale, added Linda Magyar, the Sacramento office administrator who oversees the facility's operations.

"In my book, it definitely improved productivity," she said, adding that better morale helps improve productivity.

Employees are more comfortable in the space. They can see outside to tree-lined streets. Employees can control the temperature of their work area.

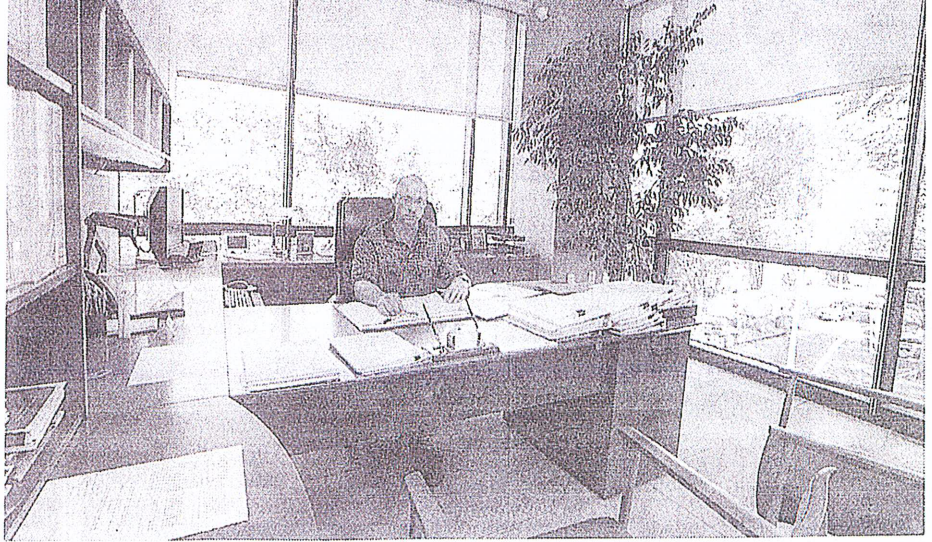
In the past, when employees came to work on weekends at the former office on 400 Capitol Mall, they'd work in the heat rather than feel guilty for cooling off half the building, Magyar said. Now, that's not an issue.

"The practice of law is stressful," Johnson said. "Anything you can do to alleviate stress puts you ahead of the game."

#### GREEN WITH ENVY OR MERELY SKEPTICISM?

Studies have shown a correlation between LEED building features and increases in tenant productivity. Even so, there are plenty of skeptics.

"What we have found is having a LEED Gold building has attracted (potential tenants) to the site, but they have a hard time sometimes believing" that the energy-efficient and environmentally friendly buildings boost productivity, said Jan



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Greg Johnson, partner with Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman, likes the "home-type environment."

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Burch, spokeswoman for a 12-story office tower near Interstate 5 known as 2020 Gateway Tower.

The 325,000-square-foot office tower opened in June 2009 and has struggled to attract tenants despite an energy-efficient rating and free parking. It was the first privately developed spec LEED Gold, Class A building in the state, Burch said.

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The LEED features that boost productivity are increased ventilation, temperature and lighting control and "daylighting," according to recent studies.

Daylighting means that 75 percent of all interior spaces provide access to natural daylight and views, Burch said. At 2020 Gateway, 80 percent of all exterior walls are glass. Filtered fresh air is automatically piped into the building when the outside temperature is cooler than inside. The air is "particle free," exceeding hospital-grade air quality, and all the carpet and paint is free of volatile organic compound emissions, Burch said.

She said she hopes to get a local university graduate program to study the issue.

### COSTS AND BENEFITS OF GREEN

There are "hundreds of published testimonials" about the health and productivity benefits that result from adopting green design strategies, according to a 2003 report, "The Costs and Financial Benefits of Green Buildings," developed for the state's Sustainable Building Task Force.

The report concluded that while more research is needed to better quantify the savings associated with health and productivity benefits, there is a significant correlation between green building design and increased productivity.

The report recommends attributing a 1.5 percent productivity and health gain to Gold- and Platinum-level buildings. For state employees, a 1.5 percent increase in productivity — about seven minutes each working day — is equal to \$1,000 a year per employee, according to the report.

A new study by researchers at Michigan State University, published in the American Journal of Public Health, likewise indicates that employees who work in environmentally friendly buildings are more productive and take fewer sick days. Researchers studied employees who moved from conventional office buildings to LEED-rated buildings in Lansing, Mich.

The report found that improvements in perceived productivity could result in an additional 40 work hours a year for each employee in a green building.

[melanieturner@bizjournals.com](mailto:melanieturner@bizjournals.com) | 916-558-7859