



A Letter from the 2008 USGBC CT-B Outgoing Chair Heather DeGrella



How fast a year can come and go! The speed at which 2008 passed has led me to start off the year reflective of how little time we each have on planet Earth — and how much work there is left to do. With this thought, the Chapter's Mission to accelerate the transformation toward sustainable building and land development practices in Central Texas through innovation, advocacy and partnerships meets with a growing sense of urgency.

In a single year, the global economy has tanked. But at the same time, we have reached a watershed moment where the political climate and the will of the nation has come together to create the most opportune moment to date to make changes on a scale that will have a monumental impact on climate change. The economic down turn does not necessarily mean a slow-down for the sustainability movement. In fact, veteran greenbuilding guru, Jerry Yudelson, predicts that [the green building industry will grow more than 60 percent this year.](#)

So what a difference a year can make! The birth of my son this past year reminds me of the cycle of life, of the longevity and staying power that we humans have as a species if not as individuals, and the collective ability we have to make a change. More than ever, I feel keenly aware of the impacts — good as well as bad — that we have on our planet. I now believe more than ever that our Chapter's Vision that buildings and communities will regenerate and sustain the health and vitality of all life is really happening.

Locally, the Chapter is in the final stages of hiring its first Executive Director. In order to sure the foundation so that the ED will be able to hit the ground running, we invested heavily in 2008 in strengthening the Chapter's internal workings. Through Greenlights for Nonprofit Success, we contracted with a part-time Interim Executive Director, Jack Nokes, whose expertise helped us to perform a full chapter diagnostic, update and refine our By-laws, and create policies and procedural documents for use by the board. We have also updated our [Strategic Plan](#) to guide us more decisively and to align more closely with National's strategic plan.

We've started this year off with several successes worthy of celebration. In San Antonio, Mayor Hardberger revealed [Mission Verde](#), an eleven initiatives plan to transform the city into a global leader for sustainability, economic self-reliance, renewable energy, and de-centralized energy. Several representatives from the CT-B helped shape the plan through their participation on the Mayor's Task Force on Sustainable Building. In another recent accomplishment, Travis County announced that all new and renovated county buildings budgeted over one million dollars will meet LEED Silver Standards as a minimum. Leading [that effort](#) was Roger A. El Khoury, a recipient of one of the Chapter's 2008 Greenbuild Scholarships.



Future USGBC Chairperson DeGrella?

In the year 2009, look for the Central Texas – Balcones Chapter to be proactive in the 81st Texas Legislative Session by working with key congress persons on green building and sustainable development issues. Additionally, we have launched a campaign for Greener Schools and we'll also be focusing more on green renovation and operations, among other endeavors. All of these efforts will rely heavily upon the volunteer involvement of our members. If you would like to get involved, please email info@usgbc-centraltexas.org. — We welcome and need your support!

Finally, it is my pleasure to welcome Heather Venhaus as the Chair of the 2009 Board. Heather has incredible leadership skills, as well as the passion to take the reigns and run with them. With a team of new and returning board members who are a wonderfully diverse and passionate, the Chapter is poised to have a very successful year. While it is somewhat hard for me to believe my year term as USGBC CT-B chair has come to an end, it is easy to believe that the Chapter is better positioned than ever to take advantage of the moment.