



“I believe it’s the economics that drives the majority of the market for green building. What developed as an environmental cause for early adaptors has developed into a financial opportunity for developers as well.”

— James Andrews, 2010 Chair, U.S. Green Building Council Central Texas - Balcones Chapter

Interview by Alex McIntyre, Chapter Communications Committee volunteer

Introduction

The Great Recession has impacted everyone, but for those of us involved in green building, there is a significant silver lining. Despite the economic downturn, green building has seen an upsurge in interest and activity in most sectors. The fact that it has continued to flourish while a great deal of traditional construction activity has dried up is both a testament to its staying power and a validation that building green gives owners and developers a competitive advantage in a tough marketplace. If not for tightened lending practices in recent years, green building would, in all likelihood, be even more prominent than it is today. But now, with the economy beginning to come out of its recessionary shell, green building is poised to make more inroads across all sectors of the building industry and built environment.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Central Texas. The number of LEED-certified projects (LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, the world’s most widely-accepted standard for high performance buildings) has more than doubled in Central Texas in the past two years. And roughly eight to ten times more LEED-registered projects are currently in the planning or development phases. In the major cities of Austin, San Antonio and Waco, a wave of green is washing over the region.

The Central Texas-Balcones chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council plays a pivotal role in this transformation. Through education, innovation, advocacy and communication, USGBC CT-B unites individuals passionate about the cause of creating a more sustainable future. The chapter boasts an increasingly diverse membership focused on an ever-broadening definition of green building, from energy efficiency and locally-produced materials to water-conserving landscapes and accessibility to mass transit.

Leading the effort to expand both the membership and influence of the chapter is new board chairman James Andrews. With a lengthy resume that spans multiple areas of green building, Andrews continues a tradition of passionate and knowledgeable leadership.

Mr. Andrews shares his thoughts below on his goals for the chapter.

Q: What are your goals during your tenure as chair of the USGBC CT-Balcones Chapter?

JA: We have board members, committees and volunteers with enormous talent and a passion for sustainability, and I would like to create a structure which provides the means to achieving their goals. Part of that is developing the potential of our new membership; that is, engaging them, listening to their needs, and incorporating their influence, impact and insight into our mission. I’d like to see the chapter become the go-to organization for sustainable development education, and we continue to make strides through our education programs. I want to see our advocacy heard across all 53 counties and the state capitol. Finally, I’d like to see our financial stability improve. Many people may not be aware that we are an independent 501(c)(3), which means that we don’t get any financial benefits from the national organization (national membership is for corporations; local membership is for individuals). We have had very generous “in-kind” donations, which we are very grateful for, but to provide the education programs, administrative support,

scholarships and sponsorships, we need more financial stability. In short, we need our chapter treasurer, Andrew Kelch, to sleep more soundly at night.

Q: What steps do you plan to take to meet these goals?

JA: We are partnering with like minded organizations to enable us to expand our outreach and avoid duplication in effort within the region. We have to show that we understand the issues associated with living in Central Texas and be relevant with the application of innovation and appropriate technology. Solutions have to be economically viable, meet regulatory demands and be easily managed during the life of the development. Solutions that are beautiful and didactic would be a bonus! This is what we need to be encouraging.

Our Advocacy committee is committed to meeting with policy makers and tracking legislative developments so that we can have the opportunity to educate and influence their decisions that affect millions of Texans, our beautiful landscape and precious resources. We will also be working with the regional and national organizations of USGBC to ensure that our resources are focused and effective.

Additionally, we plan to offer more value for being a member of the chapter. It's a continuing process, and it will still continue after my term is up. But after seeing the response to the volunteer evenings in Austin and San Antonio last year, I'm convinced that we do not have a passive membership. Cody Fuller, who is the chapter's membership chair, has done a wonderful job lining up membership events. Our Education and Programs committees, headed up by Victor Winston and Liana Kallivoka, add value to members by expanding existing curriculum and developing new opportunities for delivery of a wide variety of subject materials.

Q. How does being a 501(c)(3) organization help or hinder these efforts?

JA. We are a cause-driven organization, as opposed to an industry-driven association. Therefore, as a 501(c)(3) our advocacy efforts are not tainted by any form of alternate mission. Our mission is to accelerate the transformation toward sustainable building and land development practices in Central Texas. The triple bottom line — the social, economic and environmental impacts of development — makes so much sense and being able to promote that without any other political agendas is very exciting and can be extremely rewarding.

Financing is a real challenge in this economy for many nonprofits. At the beginning of this year, we discussed how we could diversify our income strategy for long term financial sustainability and reduce overhead costs where possible. The Development Committee leads the recruitment and retention of sponsors and other sources of income for the chapter, including business sponsors, government/foundation or corporate grants and individual donations. Michael Krentz, development chair, has made it his mission to provide more service to our sponsors, adding more value, and in turn hopefully driving new membership.

Many may not be aware, but at the end of 2009 we were informed that one of our major income sources, LEED Workshops, would be managed by a separate education delivery partner. I was surprised and a little frustrated by the lack of engagement from the national organization on this issue. However, I think in the long run this should ensure high quality education delivered consistently throughout the country. USGBC CT-B's education chair, Liana Kallivoka, and programs chair, Victor Winston, (and their committees) responded more enthusiastically than me. They saw this as an opportunity for us to diversify and be more responsive to our region, and in turn, provide more value.

Q. What is the future of Green Building and LEED? In the next five years? The next ten?

JA. The future is usually oversold and often under imagined. We need to imagine more. Is there a future without LEED? The world cannot continue to grow at 200,000 people per day unless we use its resources more diligently. I think most people understand that now — being green is mainstream — the question is *how* green can we be? Green building programs like LEED, Austin Energy and Build Green San Antonio give us the ability to establish benchmarks and set targets.

LEED will continue to be refined to be more regionally and building type specific, and hopefully its certification process will become more manageable so that we can see a reduction in the soft costs associated with certification. I see the sustainability concepts used for LEED prerequisites and credits being

integrated into local building codes. As this happens, LEED should continue to push boundaries toward carbon neutral construction and operation of buildings. As regions seek to reverse the trends of suburban and exurban sprawl, site selection will become even more critical, and LEED's Sustainable Sites program will create precedents and provide great best practice information that will in turn be folded in the LEED building program.

A critical challenge for us to address is the notion that green buildings cost more. We are currently working on documenting the case studies of local LEED buildings and considering teaming up with the Building Owners and Managers Association to do a more detailed building analysis that can allow us all to understand the life cycle costs of sustainable buildings. How we value the human health and productivity benefits are already being studied and make for fascinating reading.

I would love to believe that the driver of green building is the creation of a better environment for all, and that may be the case for some policy makers, but I believe it's the economics that drives the majority of the market. That's why we need to publicize the variety of benefits of green buildings. What developed as an environmental cause for early adaptors has developed into a financial opportunity for the developers.

We also need to raise awareness of the benefits of building re-use and greening existing buildings. New buildings form only a very small part of our towns and cities. Even when we are designing and building carbon neutral, self sufficient new buildings, we are barely scratching the surface of the challenge. We need to find ways to improve the performance of existing buildings, with high performance HVAC systems, improved water conservation and reuse, green or cool roofs, better facades and the ability to integrate renewable energy generation systems.

Q: At the midpoint of your first year as chair, how do you assess the chapter's progress?

JA: We are in a strong position to achieve our goals. Our committees are functioning well, although we could use some additional volunteers. While financing remains a challenge, our budget is in a healthy state. We continue to participate effectively at both the regional and national levels of USGBC. And we've transitioned to new technology that should drastically improve our membership management, communications and accounting. In sum, USGBC CT-B has put the framework in place to allow us to focus our collective energies on our mission — accelerating the transformation toward sustainable building practices and land development in Central Texas.