

## Be a Myth Destroyer:— Green Construction Doesn't Cost More

By Paul Hoffman

You should never go swimming until an hour after you eat. Were you told that as a child? Do you know it's not true? We all have stories that we initially believe, but later find they are mere myths. Do you believe that it has to cost more to build green? That's just another myth it's time to dispel.

The "green design and construction costs more" myth prospered because of early practices and inexperienced, ill-informed consulting firms that lack sustainable knowledge. ***If approached wisely, sustainable construction should cost less, and an additional benefit is the lower operations costs that these projects provide on an ongoing basis.***

### The Facts are Clear

In numerous cost comparisons, the data proves our sustainable projects were delivered at a price that was significantly less than those utilizing conventional design and construction practices. For example, two Wisconsin schools which received LEED® (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold certification were completed well below the cost for conventional construction of similar schools built during the same period and in the same region.

In the case of River Crest Elementary School (Hudson, WI) the cost savings was \$57/square foot. This saved the school district over \$5,300,000. Mary Bowen-Eggebraaten, Hudson School District Superintendent, adds, "... the final 'wow' was when the cost per square foot was beneath the area cost per square foot of conventional construction, not even green construction. That was the extra 'wow' that people in the community were just really thrilled about."

### Cost Savings are a By-Product

It's important to note that green construction cost savings are a by-product of hundreds of thoughtful decisions made jointly by the client and knowledgeable design and building professionals. This must include initial research to determine exactly what is needed to right-size a structure, and numerous other decisions that reduce waste and ensure the proper selection of the best products for the specific project.

All involved parties must seek to reduce waste. In the case of Holy Wisdom Monastery in Madison (a recently finished project that is pending LEED® certification), 99.5 percent of all construction waste materials were reused or recycled. This not only resulted in less impact on the ever-increasing mountains at community landfills but a reduction in overall expenses.

All stakeholders must also be willing to optimize Value Trading<sup>SM</sup>. Value Trading<sup>SM</sup> is the process of adding features with more value and paying for those by eliminating features of less value to improve the overall performance of the project within the allowable project budget.

Countless choices and options arise at every turn of a construction project; but wise decisions and proper planning simultaneously yield smart savings and sustainable solutions.

### It's Your Turn

Now, you too can be a myth buster. If you hear someone say that designing and building green costs more, tell them it's just not true and encourage them to dig deeper to learn more. And while you're destroying old myths, perhaps you'll also grab a snack and go for a quick dip in the pool!

**Paul J. Hoffman** ([phoffman@hoffman.net](mailto:phoffman@hoffman.net)) is owner and president of Hoffman LLC ([www.Hoffman.net](http://www.Hoffman.net)), a Wisconsin-based planning, architecture and construction management firm that has aggressively advocated for sustainable design and construction since the 1990s, long before "green" became the new American fashion statement. Paul is currently Vice-Chair of the Building Division of the Associated General Contractors.



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Construction waste recycling at Holy  
Wisdom Monastery