

Geothermal Heats Up in Downtown Pittsburgh

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Green development and sustainability are fundamental to Trek Development Group's mission.

"We are not afraid to take chances with new products and systems; however, we evaluate every idea thoroughly and try to choose what makes sense, what creates value for lenders, investors, partners, and, most important, the residents," says William J. Gatti Jr., president of the Pittsburgh-based company.

A prime example of the developer's mission is The Century Building in downtown Pittsburgh.

Initiated by the Downtown Housing Working Group as an answer to a growing concern regarding the lack of affordable housing development in the downtown housing boom, Trek reused and re-adapted an underutilized building in Pittsburgh's Central Business District into 60 units, with 28 of the units targeting residents earning less than 60 percent of the area median income.

"I think the product, location, and price are important, but the green features are the main attraction," says Gatti.

One of the major green features of the building is its open-loop geothermal heating and cooling system, which has four high-capacity wells that harness the natural energy within the earth to heat and cool the building.

According to Trek, the geothermal energy is available year-round and mixes with supplemental heating and cooling to provide a consistent level of comfort while reducing energy costs.

Gatti adds that geothermal is about 80 percent of what Trek is doing. "We believe in it strongly," he says. "It makes sense financially to do geothermal."



Green features at The Century Building in Pittsburgh include Energy Star appliances, a green roof, and secure bike storage for residents and commuters.

The building also features Energy Star appliances, low-flow water fixtures, dual-flush toilets, and thermally efficient windows, and highly efficient compact fluorescent lamps and fixtures light the common spaces. Gatti estimates that residents are seeing between 30 percent and 40 percent in utility savings.

Other green features include operable windows that allow natural

ventilation in the units and a demand energy recovery ventilation system that provides fresh air when windows are closed. Also, the building has a green roof and recycling areas on each floor.

Because of the urban location, residents have the opportunity to be car-free. The Century Building is close to all major bus lines, and there is a Zipcar ride-share program next door.

The developer also teamed with the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust, the Pittsburgh Downtown Partnership, and the Southwestern Pennsylvania Commission to create a bicycle commuter center on-site that provides secure bike storage for residents and other city commuters.

The development, which was completed in August 2009, is seeking Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) gold certification.

The \$18 million project was financed with \$7.7 million in low-income housing tax credit equity, syndicated by PNC Real Estate; \$3.2 million from the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust; \$2.9 million from the Strategic Investment Fund; \$2.8 million from the Urban Redevelopment Authority in hard and soft loan commitments; \$750,000 from the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development in soft debt; and \$255,000 from the Federal Home Loan Bank

of Pittsburgh.

As for advice for other developers making the jump to green, Gatti encourages others to do their homework first. "Speak to more than one consultant: engineer, architect, LEED professional, etc," he says. "Most important, find a contractor that truly believes in the value of environmental sustainability—one that has experience with it." ■