

## Plant talk

By Jo Rossman

# Getting an Edge on Green: LEED Accreditation



As more retailers seek to incorporate sustainable strategies into their new and remodeled stores, LEED accreditation<sup>®</sup> a professional credential surrounding the green building practices and principles of the LEED Green Building rating system<sup>®</sup> is becoming more important to retail environments. Architects and designers have been seeking LEED accredited Professional (LEED AP) status in droves; now non-designers are joining them.

### WHO'S SEEKING LEED AP

Nancy Overhart, studio principal for Little, a national architecture and design firm of retail banks based in Charlotte, N.C., obtained her LEED AP accreditation three years ago. "At the time, clients weren't interested in greening their projects. Now it's rare for a client to not consider it," she says.

While LEED, the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design's set of green building certification systems developed by the U.S. Green Building Council, isn't the

only game in town for green projects, it is the most widely accepted certification systems. Green project leaders refer to it even when not seeking certification. Consequently, many design firms encourage staff to seek accreditation. According to a recent Building Design and Construction report, 22.5 percent of Gensler employees, 21.9 percent of Little employees, and 16.7 percent of HOK employees are LEED-accredited.

But those LEED AP initials are no longer limited to designers. "Most of our LEED-

## What's Involved

ACCREDITATION INVOLVES INTENSIVE STUDY of a LEED rating system and passing a credentialing exam by demonstrating minimum competency in four areas:

- Knowledge of LEED Credit Intents and Requirements,
- Coordinate Project and Team,
- Implement LEED Process, and
- Verify, Participate in, and Perform Technical Analyses Required for LEED Credits.

Three exam tracks are available: New Construction, Existing Buildings, and Commercial Interiors. Only one exam track must be passed; the most relevant track for most A.R.E. member companies is Commercial Interiors.

No prerequisites are required to sit for the exam and over 200 manufacturing personnel have passed it, but it tends to be more difficult for suppliers than for designers. At St. Louis-based fixture company idX Corporation, employees ranging from purchasing to product development personnel are studying for the exam. "They are very dependent on my architectural experience to help them understand the building portions of it," says Lisa A. Thompson, LEED AP, idX's director of environmental development. Thompson, who was accredited prior to joining idX when she worked at a design firm, mentors exam candidates both within idX and outside of her organization and chairs A.R.E.'s Green LEED Subcommittee.

LEED APs recommend the following preparation:

**Find a mentor.** "Find an architect or engineer who is already a LEED AP to mentor you throughout the study process. They can give you tips on how to study and what to expect when you take the exam," Thompson suggests.

**Take a course.** Offered at sites around the country, the USGBC workshop "LEED for Commercial Interiors Technical Review" is a full-day program on the basic principles of sustainability as they relate to tenant improvement projects and the standards for

what constitutes a green interior. It addresses technologies and strategies for achieving LEED credits to optimize the performance of leased spaces. Other courses may be available at local colleges and universities, through local USGBC chapters, or through other organizations. And A.R.E.'s Green 100 is working to develop a webinar series to help members.

**Study the guide.** The study guide, *LEED for Commercial Interiors v2.0 Reference Guide*, is available at a discount to CI workshop attendees. Local USGBC chapters also may offer additional resources. Professional Publications Inc., ppi2pass.com, offers a study package including flash cards and a sample exam.

**Join a study group.** Many design firms have study groups for their employees, and community study groups may be available through local USGBC chapters. Some study groups bring in guest speakers to address specific sustainable building topics. "Some one experienced in the building trades can provide a lot of insight into specific LEED credits," Thompson explains.

**Get involved in a LEED project.** Joining a project team can provide practical experience that helps a candidate understand the process.

**Stay motivated.** "There is so much content in the LEED exam that consistent studying is the only way to be truly prepared," says Thompson. She recommends studying for a couple of hours daily with in-depth studying the weekend before the exam.

Tests are administered through the Green Building Certification Institute at more than 275 Prometric test sites in the U.S. and at more sites throughout the world. If a candidate fails the exam, it can be taken again at a later date, but the exam fee (\$300 for USGBC members, \$400 for non-members) applies each time.

LEED AP was essentially a lifetime credential, but that is changing. A LEED AP credential maintenance program is under development. Details will be announced later this year.



accredited professionals are designers, but some administrative and marketing employees also have undertaken accreditation to understand the issues our design team faces," says Joe Pettipas, LEED AP, vice president of HOK Canada.

For example, employees of retail environments suppliers also are beginning to take the plunge. Three employees at Advanced Fixtures Inc. in Farmersville, Texas, are currently enrolled in a LEED accreditation class. "We want to be ahead of the curve by taking the necessary steps to become green," says Kurt Saunders, vice president, business development. Several employees of Philadelphia-based Sparks Custom Retail are currently pursuing LEED AP. Larry Cooper, Sparks' director of engineering and development, says the idea is to be able to converse with customers more intelligently. Shawn Reza, design engineer for Vista Visual Group, a Lindenhurst, N.Y.-based signage company, agrees. "Being accredited will help us better understand

the green requirements for jobs for commercial buildings," he says.

To fulfill a marketing objective, EMI Industries is encouraging employees to seek accreditation. "LEED certification of buildings is having a definite impact on the fixture industry," explains Eric W. Johnson, vice president of sales and marketing for the fixture company.

Trimco Display LLC, a seasonal and holiday décor firm based in Carteret, N.J., is

investigating the process while helping employees become accredited. "The eco movement is a long-term initiative and we must be prepared. Having our people accredited will help us become better informed," says Ken Stolls, executive vice president.

Carolyn Peterson, marketing communications manager of Boston Retail, started pursuing the accreditation to better understand how to market the firm's ecoSeries bumper line. Her journey led her to a surprising discovery: Merely studying for accreditation offers tremendous benefits for suppliers.

"I learned how some companies are using inaccurate marketing terminology and how we can communicate the sustainable benefits of our products properly," she says. With retailers and designers looking to suppliers to educate them about green products, such green marketing expertise is essential. ■

Jo Rossman is Retail Environments' senior editor.

## RESOURCES

- For information on educational courses, and to download sample exam questions, the LEED rating systems, and pertinent materials, visit [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org).

- To find a mentor or to be matched with a LEED project team for professional development purposes, e-mail your name, title, company name, contact information, and whether you are looking for a mentor or a project team, to [leedmatch@retailenvironments.org](mailto:leedmatch@retailenvironments.org). A.R.E. will distribute your request (A.R.E. members only).

- For information on scheduling an exam, visit [www.gbci.org](http://www.gbci.org).