

The Sisters Go Green: New Facility Part of Concerted Effort to Reduce Carbon Footprint

In 2007, the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, a community of 500 vowed Catholic women and 500 lay associates throughout the heartland of the United States, made a commitment to “strengthen, heal and renew the Earth”. This commitment was very much on the minds of the La Grange Park Congregation when planning started for its new, environmentally friendly, two-story assisted care facility at 1515 W. Ogden Ave., adjacent to Nazareth Academy. In addition to the new building, the Spirituality Center and administrative offices will be renovated. The pioneering group first established itself in La Grange Park in 1899.

Throughout this past year, what to the casual observer looked to be a typical building demolition was actually the “deconstruction” of the oversized and inefficient six-story facility. According to Sister Pat Bergen, while the Sisters were not seeking a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification, the criteria for LEED Gold buildings were the guide for the construction and renovation project, started in 2017, with estimated completion set for 2019.



Sister Bergen emphasized that great care was taken to recover and re-use material from the building. Approximately 2300 tons of bricks, 225 tons of wood and 673 tons of additional building materials (metal, doors and windows) were recovered for donation to Habitat for Humanity and other agencies that build homes for those in need (and thus avoiding landfill).



Using the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Waste Reduction Model, over 2500 metric tons of Green House Gas emissions are estimated to be avoided by the donation of the bricks, wood and other material. These donations to Habitat for Humanity equate to removing over 500 vehicles from the road for a year.



Contractors of the new two-story assisted care facility are utilizing environmentally-friendly materials when possible, including carpet made from recycled materials. Solar panels have been and will continue to be installed, potentially generating 100 kilowatt hours (kWh) of power annually. Shared “pool” cars utilized by the Sisters are hybrid or fuel-efficient cars (getting at least 40 miles per gallon). In addition, plug-in charging stations for electric cars are

being installed in the designated parking areas. Lighting in all the complex buildings will be converted to high-efficiency LED fixtures and all bathroom appliances converted to water-efficient fixtures.



When the project is complete, the Sisters' commitment to "strengthen, heal and renew the Earth" will surely make a meaningful impact. The Sisters estimate the La Grange Park campus will reduce its carbon footprint by 60%, its energy usage by 36% and water usage by 35%.

By Sustainability Commission Member Jeff Nee, with assistance from Commission Member David Mrazek
Special thanks to Sister Pat Bergen, Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph, La Grange Park
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