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Green: It's the New Gold

By Patricia Gerlach

Green is no longer just a familiar blip on the color wheel showing what happens when yellow is smeared on blue, instead it now represents an emerging American lifestyle.

Look around. You'll see it in the West Loop where sleek recycled glass terrazzo floors and classic furnishings upholstered in recycled polyester anchor the uptown glamour of Emerald's totally sustainable 8,000-square-foot lobby.

It's evident in the turbines that generate some of the power planned to run EcoLogic Lofts, a 94-unit development slated to begin in Bucktown. The EcoLogic model home, created by designer John Robert Wiltgen, is a virtual primer in establishing an eco-friendly home.

Across town, imagine the stunning, futuristic 150-story Chicago Spire that by 2012 will add a new dimension to the city's iconic skyline along with 1,200 eco-chic high-rise homes.

The results of a green drive spearheaded by Mayor Richard J. Daley boosted Chicago to the top echelon of U.S. green cities. The city has retrofitted more than 1 million square meters of space in municipal buildings to meet the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) silver certifica-

tion standard set by the U.S. Green Building Council.

In 2007, the city entered into a partnership with the Clinton Foundation that enabled an overhaul of private housing and two major Chicago landmarks: the Sears Tower and the Merchandise Mart – the country's tallest building and largest commercial building, respectively – to qualify for LEED certification.

Both at home and at work, consumers are showing a marked increase in interest in products that use natural resources wisely and respect the environment, according to a recent study of green brands by Landor Associates, an international brand development consultancy. And, citing the success of Whole Foods Market, the Landor research demonstrated that customers pay a premium to support green efforts.

While the green philosophy is going strong in the area of both renovation and new residential and commercial construction, the concept isn't always limited to matters of brick and mortar.

Going green can cut operating costs for existing homes and businesses. Energy bills can be reduced by up to 30 percent

with investments in energy-efficient air conditioners or new windows, which will pay over time, according to Energy Star, a government program that assists businesses and consumers conserve energy.

While it's difficult to imagine that one newfangled light bulb or some recycled paper really makes a difference, it does.

At Emerald, for example, John Robert Wiltgen and his design team worked with a lighting consultant to develop a futuristic system for the elegant \$4 million lobby that uses light-emitting diodes (LED's) and mirrors that actually create their own abstract art within the space.

"It's stunning and it operates at less than 25 percent of the cost of a traditional incandescent system," says Wiltgen. Sensors power off the system when areas are not being used, creating additional savings.

To make changes at your home or business, determine exactly how you consume resources. Consider energy and water use, what can be recycled and the quality of your environment and indoor air. An energy audit is a good way to begin, as it will recommend improvements and strategies for cost reduction. For information, contact the Illinois Association of Energy Rates (ilenergyrates.com).

Be sure to set up a plan to phase in changes as you have time and resources, and be flexible and realistic.

Here are some suggestions that may help your business turn a brighter shade of green while maintaining sensible profit levels:

- Switch to electronic communication. Use paper only when absolutely necessary.
- Use a programmable thermostat set to dial up or down depending on occupancy of a space.
- Install timers on lights and electronic equipment enabling electricity to shut down nights, weekends and holidays.
- Shop for energy-efficient computers, monitors, fax machines, printers, copiers, etc. Look for the Energy Star label.
- Schedule annual checkups for HVAC systems to avoid wasting energy and money.
- Replace washers on dripping faucets. One faucet dripping once every second adds up to 2,700 gallons of water per year.

Adopting eco-friendly products and practices not only helps ensure the future of the earth, but also attracts more folding green as well. And that's everyone's favorite shade of our new favorite color.

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