





LEEDING THE WAY

by LINDA DECKARD

The newest cutting-edge green initiative for Jeff Blosser, executive director of the Oregon Convention Center, will be a sustainability exposition for small business owners. While there are a lot of “greenies talking to greenies,” not many, if any, are educating the small business owner about how it makes economic sense to incorporate recycling, composting or alternative power sources into a day-to-day operation, he said.

“What you’re seeing now is social change. There are a lot of companies and a lot of staff, as well as governments, that are kind of demanding it,” Blosser told *Venues Today*. “There is a huge social responsibility movement, what’s right for the environment and what you should do. The messaging is coming from within.”

That was somewhat the case when he first started recycling at the convention center in 1990, but now it has reached a crescendo, and Blosser is at the head of the class when it comes to sustainable public assembly facilities, a position that led to his selection as 2008 *Venues Today* Hall of Headlines winner for marketing.

In November, the 1-million-square-foot Oregon Convention Center was re-certified Silver LEED EB (existing building), a huge accomplishment and particularly pleasing because “it’s starting to make business sense,” Blosser said.

The convention center has raised \$30,000 and found six partners, including BOMA (Building Operators and Managers Association) to host the aforementioned, inaugural exposition, tentatively called Achieve Green, June 2-3, 2009. Blosser is anticipating an attendance of 1,000 with 56 exhibitors, drawing from Oregon and Southwest Washington. It will be geared toward what the 10-person employer can do to achieve sustainability. “We want folks to leave here with a takeaway they can apply immediately,” Blosser said.

The road to LEEDS EB silver certification has been steady-as-she-goes for Blosser. He did not join the environmental movement as an activist. He has taken a businesslike approach from the get go.

The real greening aspects started to take shape with the Oregon Convention Center expansion conversations in 2000, he recalled. At that point, it was too expensive and too convoluted to



The rain garden at the Oregon Convention Center, Portland.

retrofit the existing building, but the \$118 million expansion was LEED-worthy all the way.

That included daylighting, a rain garden, collecting the water, and sending parking lot, loading dock and garage run-off and waste through oil/water separators. While they dou-

bled the size of the building in 2004, they added no more parking, relying on light rail and bicycles. The latter is big for local shows, he said. “We have three bike-only events here on an annual basis and we’ll get from 20-50 bikes. We have a dinner for the Toe Clips event for 500 people, and we’ll get close to a 100 bikes for that.” The venue has parking for 50-100 bikes now, compared to none before the expansion.

Sustainability has proven its value economically in numerous ways Blosser is quick to enumerate. For instance, this fiscal year the center diverted 266 tons of materials from landfills, with an overall diversion rate of 43.6 percent, up by approximately 12 percent over the previous fiscal year.

In the 2005-06 fiscal year, the center’s total waste bill was \$53,000. In 2007-08, it was \$52,000 “and we had less waste out of the building with more events because of recycling,” Blosser said.

“One thing people don’t really understand is that while the new construction certification is awesome, you have to reapply in five years under the existing building rules,” he added. And each time, there are new standards. What used to garner points becomes a pre-requisite for LEED certification and new innovations count toward the scorecard. “The points change, the boundaries change. I really wish USGBC would consider assembly facilities in a different category. We’re in the same genre as office buildings, and we don’t work Monday through Friday nine to five,” Blosser said.

Composting has been perhaps the most economically beneficial initiative so far. Next, Blosser is looking at a major, \$9 million-\$10 million solar project. “We’re already 45 percent wind. Our goal is to get 100 percent renewable energy at some point in time,” Blosser said.

The joke of the industry used to be how long you could cook in the same grease. Now they recycle grease and make biofuel out of it. “It’s a 360 — buy it, use it, put it back in your car,” Blosser said. That was his ah-ha moment.