Projects make environment a top concern

BY SCOTT TRAVIS
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The official school colors may be red and blue, but at Florida Atlantic University, green has recently become all the rage.

The university is trying to establish itself as a leader in Earth-friendly construction. Newer buildings use bamboo (a wood that regrows quickly), solar panels, low-flow plumbing fixtures and recycled materials.

It started with the Lynn College of Nursing, which last year became the first structure in South Florida to receive the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, certification, from the U.S. Green Building Council.

Now, a new elementary school next to the Pine Jog Environmental Education Center, a joint partnership with the Palm Beach County School District, expects to become the state’s first green K-12 school when it opens in August.

And a new College of Engineering building under design might become the greenest of them all. Officials will seek for it a LEED platinum certification, the highest ranking available.

There are no platinum certified buildings in Florida and only about 70 nationwide.

More green buildings are planned. President Frank Brogan agreed in 2007 to sign the “University President’s Climate Commitment,” which brought FAU into a nationwide campaign to reduce greenhouse gases by 80 percent by mid-century. He said all future university construction projects will be built to LEED standards.

“It’s the right thing to do as far as environmental consciousness,” said Azita Dashtaki, assistant vice president for facilities. “And a green building leads to better productivity and a healthier building.”

Anne Boykin, dean of the College of Nursing, said many of her staff members suffered lung problems when they were in an old musty building on campus. When the new building opened in 2005, those problems disappeared. The nursing building received the LEED certification of gold, the second highest available.

The green movement has been sweeping the country for much of the past decade, but South Florida has been slow to catch up. The Lynn College of Nursing was certified green in September, soon followed by the Broward County South Regional Library. Several other projects are in the works.

Building green costs 1 percent to 5 percent more initially, but that’s made up over time in reduced operating costs, said Tom Donaudy, FAU’s vice president for planning. Green buildings have more efficient lighting and cooling systems.

The College of Engineering decided to construct one of the greenest buildings in the state to get attention and donors’ support, said Karl Stevens, dean of the college.

“We’re trying to showcase ourselves as leaders in this area,” Stevens said.

He said the design will have more windows than the Lynn Nursing building, allowing almost every office to have natural light, Stevens said.

Few structures seek the most stringent LEED standards, because they’re more expensive to construct in Florida, Stevens said.

“You have to let light into a building and you have to block the heat, but in Florida, any barrier to block the heat has to withstand hurricanes,” he said, and that adds to the cost.

Stevens anticipates the project will cost $43 million, most of which is expected to come from state dollars earmarked for capital projects.

FAU has partnered with the school district to develop the $37.6 million elementary campus next to Pine Jog Environmental Education Center west of West Palm Beach. FAU donated the school and plans to operate an environmental center on campus.

Glenn Thomas, director of pre-K to 12 programs at FAU, said school officials were interested in building a prototype of a green school.

SOLAR HEATING: Olena Makhnyeva, of Boca Raton, studies biology in a hallway with an atrium as a backdrop at FAU’s Lynn College of Nursing in Boca Raton. The nursing college has received a leadership certification from the U.S. Green Building Council. Staff photo/Joe Amon.

TAKING THE LEAD

Florida Atlantic University builds with the environment in mind:

Lynn College of Nursing last year received the Leadership in Energy and Environment Design, or LEED, certification from the U.S. Green Building Council.

College of Engineering plans to build the greenest building in the state, a $43 million structure that FAU expects will receive LEED’s highest certification.

FAU and the Palm Beach County School District teamed up to build a $37.6 million elementary school that is being billed as Florida’s first green elementary school.