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The Scott Fountain on Belle Isle | Marvin Shaouni

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Old and Green: Detroit Innovators and Renovators Give Buildings Sustainable Overhauls

By: Kelli B. Kavanaugh



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Old buildings. Detroit is chock full of 'em. People tend to view their value in architectural or historical terms, not environmental. After all, it's eas(ier) to build a new building that is highly insulated and has a solar hot water heater than it is to take a drafty manse and make it efficient.

At least at a surface glance, it is.

But more Detroiters are ignoring conventional wisdom, taking matters into their own hands and going green within the city's existing building stock. And many will point out rightly that that is actually greener than new construction -- as green renovations use all 3 Rs: reduce, reuse and recycle.

Here are some of their stories.



City Hall? Really.

Considering that Detroit is just getting a pilot curbside recycling program off the ground, one would be forgiven for thinking that the [Coleman A. Young Municipal Center](#) has open windows in the winter, old-school space heaters tucked under desks and buzzing florescent bulbs that get left on all night.

You'd be way wrong.

For the third consecutive year, the building has received the Energy Star label from the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Department of Energy for its overall efficiency. The building, which is owned and operated by the Detroit Wayne Joint Building Authority, has gone so green that it has saved taxpayers a bundle: \$3 million over the past three years.

What's been done? Simple things like modifying building hours of operation to reduce electricity needs (implementing daytime cleaning and maintenance, for example, so lights aren't on all night), improving thermostatic controls and upgrading lighting by adding 18,000 high-efficiency lamps and electronic ballasts.

On top of that, heating and cooling systems have been upgraded and -- in what might be

most progressive measure of all -- the flow of the Detroit River is used to chill computer systems. Gregg McDuffee, the building authority's general manager, estimates that this alone saves more than \$700,000 per year in water charges.

Overall utility consumption has been reduced by 50 percent, which has reduced tenant rent paid by the City of Detroit and Wayne County and allowed reinvestment in capital improvements such as the Spirit of Detroit statue restoration, renovation of the City Council auditorium and improvements to the Center's automation system that will further reduce electrical consumption.

The authority's plans call for continued greening efforts, with the ultimate eye toward LEED certification for the building, the gold standard in building sustainability ratings.

Southwest nonprofits lead by example

It's not just the city out there on an environmental limb. Community

development corporations are doing their part to get on the green train. Two of the city's most productive non-profits, Southwest Housing Solutions and Southwest Detroit Business Association have both transformed unproductive former social halls into green -- and, not incidentally, architecturally-stunning -- rehab projects that anchor two ends of W. Vernor Highway.



On the east end of the drag is SDBA's Odd Fellows Hall, at W. Vernor and Springwells. The renovation of the 15,000-square-foot building, built in 1917 as a home for its namesake fraternal organization, was completed in late 2006. Now home to several nonprofits, including COMPAS, Center of Music and Performing Arts Southwest, the building is heated and cooled by a geothermal system.



Translation: 45 wells drilled to a depth of 250 feet circulate heat away from the building in the summer -- and towards the building in the winter. Utility savings? Estimated at 50 percent or less than it would be with a conventional system.

Just east of W. Grand Boulevard sits the stately Lithuanian Hall, now home to a Kumon tutoring center and the offices of Southwest Housing Solutions. It's notable as one of the few rehab projects to be attempting LEED certification. It's currently registered, a step in the [complex process](#).

You want more examples? Check Midtown

At the [Green Garage](#), just south of The Bronx on Second, the focus is on brainstorming green enterprise and building green collar jobs. Naturally, the building is being rehabbed in a super green manner, starting with a green alley behind. Read more [here](#).

Midtown developer Scott Lowell has put a green stamp on his two current projects, the recently completed Beethoven Apartments on Third and the soon-to-start Forest Arms Apartments on Second. Solar panels on the roofs and heat exchange systems, people. Read more [here](#) and [here](#).

Green it yourself

Inspired? Motivated? There are several local resources you can turn to for education and materials information.

Your first appointment should be with [WARM Training Center](#), located on Michigan Avenue in Southwest Detroit. Their showroom gets into the nitty-gritty of green buildings -- from low VOC carpeting to solar powered hot water heaters to sustainably harvested wood for cabinets.

These folks are the experts, and they are there to help Detroit residents, businesses and organizations get green in an affordable way. Plus, they run a very helpful blog. Visit them online or give them a ring, stat.

Beyond that, there's Architectural Salvage Warehouse of Detroit www.aswdetroit.org, just west of Woodbridge on Grand River. Rehabbers looking to reuse materials like molding, windows and the like must make ASW a regular stop on their journey.

Over in Ann Arbor, Matt and Kelly Grocoff recently launched [Greenovation TV](#), an Internet channel dedicated to, well, green renovations. They've been through the maze in their own 107-year-old home, and launched Greenovation to help others undergoing the same trials and tribulations.



Read up on tax credits you might qualify for at the [Energy Star](#) website. Insulation,

windows, upgraded appliances...all these things will indeed cost you up-front, but save you money with Uncle Sam come 2009 tax time -- and in your utility bills for the long haul.

If all this sounds like more than you might want to take on, don't fret. There are people around that can help. One name that comes to mind is Michael Olszewski of Treetop Craftsman, Inc. The skilled carpenter has installed a passive solar heater and windmill at his live-work space in Woodbridge -- and his small business can help send you down the same path.

Kelli B. Kavanaugh is Development News editor for Model D and writes the Greenspace column for both Model D and [Metromode](#).

Photos:

[Green Garage](#)

[City County Building](#)

[Odd Fellows Hall](#)

[Lithuanian Hall](#)

[Architectural Salvage Warehouse](#)

Photographs by Detroit Photographer [Marvin Shaouni](#) *Marvin Shaouni is the Managing Photographer for [Metromode](#) & [Model](#) Contact Marvin [here](#)*

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