



SMART COMPANIES

FOR THESE FREE STATE "ECO-PRENEURS," BEING EARTH-FRIENDLY IS ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

Whether by recycling, promoting energy savings, disposing of waste in a responsible manner, or adopting practices that reduce pollutants, businesses across the Free State are going green. And for some of these companies, this "green thinking" doesn't just pertain to the business they do, but to the spaces in which they do it.

One such space is the Enviro Center in Jessup, which houses six green businesses. Owner Stan Sersen, an architect who is also president of ASG Inc., a firm located in the center, purchased the property in 2002. Instead of simply demolishing the 1905 farmhouse that came with the land, the forward-thinking entrepreneur used de-construction techniques and harvested

much of the original building's materials for the new structure.

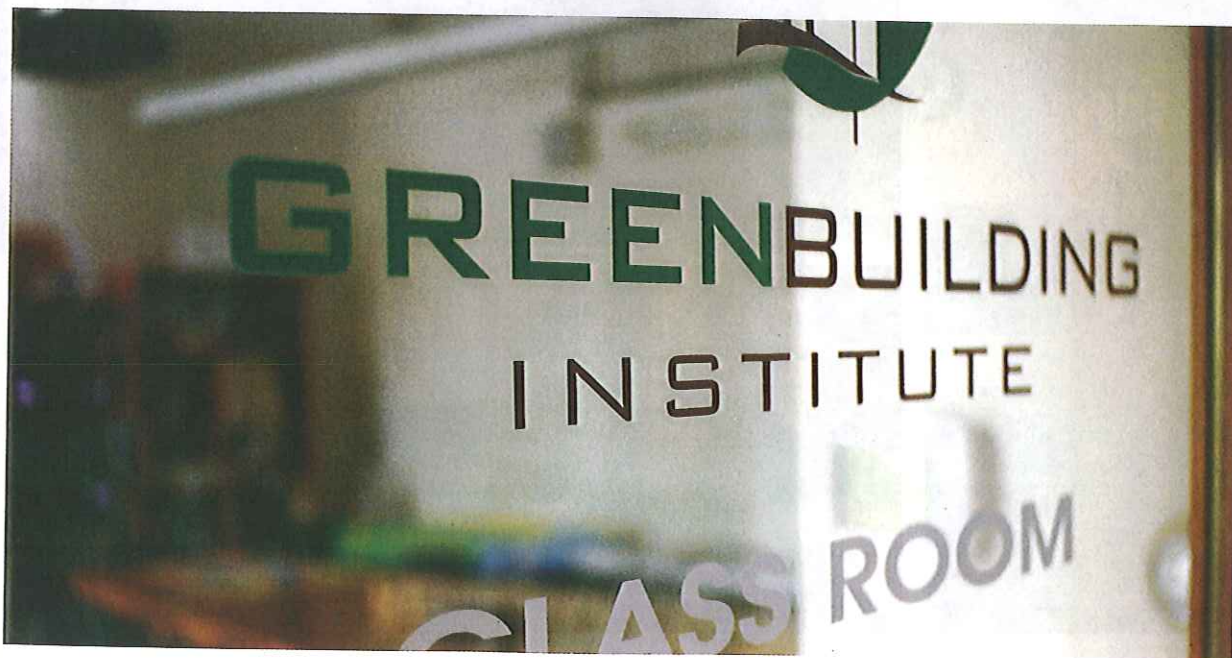
And rather than using wood, he used wheatboard (an eco-friendly material made of wheat stalks) for trim pieces, planks made of sunflower-seed shells for the counter in the reception area, and carpet made of 100-percent-recyclable fibers (referred to as a "cradle-to-cradle" product, the carpet, once discarded, can be returned to the manufacturer and made into new carpet).

The Enviro Center also features innovative construction methods, as well as green products to pull natural light into the building so that less artificial light is used (and more energy is saved). For example, light shafts and a fiber-optic

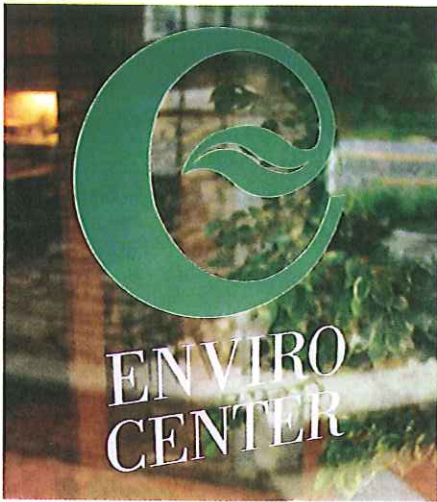
lighting system deliver natural light to windowless rooms. And vestibules stand at all the entrances of the building to block cold or hot outside air from coming in as people enter or exit.

A ventilation system in the building was designed to create a Venturi effect, which ushers out hot air trapped inside the space. Windows and overhangs are configured to allow direct sunlight to enter during the cold months and be diverted during the hot ones. And solar panels on the roof (which also houses a rainwater-collection system) convert sunlight into energy used to heat water for the building-wide radiant-heat system.

And the pièce de résistance? The site uses electricity generated on Maryland wind farms.



The Enviro Center in Jessup houses six green businesses.



Sersen refers to the Enviro Center, which is currently being expanded to house more offices and an indoor farm, as a “regenerative building design.” Once phase two is complete, the site will be cleaning air and water and will produce so much energy on its own that it will be able to return some of that energy back to the grid.

Adds Sersen, the center uses 50-60 percent less energy than a regular office building. And, since he is a green architect, he uses it to showcase to prospective clients just how eco-friendly a space can be.

TAKING THE LEED

Headquartered in Columbia, the Manekin Construction Company doesn't just know a little about being green: It constructs LEED-certified buildings. LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification is a standard of measuring the sustainability of a structure and is considered by many to be the best way to determine that a building is green. The building that houses Manekin is LEED Silver Certified.

According to Manekin's senior vice president, Core Schnorf, the building includes a high-efficiency HVAC system that has an energy savings of about 35 percent. The landscaping is drought-

resistant, so there's no need for sprinklers, and the building also features low-flow water fixtures and waterless urinals.

Motion sensors in each office detect when a room is empty and then turn off the lights. The building also takes advantage of natural sunlight, and a light-sensing balance system automatically dims the lights when enough natural light is pouring in. A CO2 detection system assures adequate amounts of fresh air.

Some of Manekin's other green features include carpets and ceilings made from recycled materials, thermostats on timers, a reflective roof (which helps make the building cooler), and adhesives and paints free of volatile toxins. Naturally, the company also recycles its construction waste.

According to Steven Newhouse, Manekin's vice president of business development, it took about seven or eight years to recoup the extra cost of the ener-



Enviro Center owner Stan Sersen (left) refers to the center as a “regenerative building design.”

gy-savings features. But it's been worth it: As at the Enviro Center, the space provides prospective clients with a tangible example of earth-friendly construction, not to mention a better understanding of what goes into a LEED-certified building.

A FORWARD-THINKING FARM

Farmers may be natural stewards of the land, but not all farms are stewarded naturally. The Claggett Farm in Upper Marlboro, however, truly is. A nonprofit operation owned since 1982 by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the farm produces organic vegetables and beef from grass-fed cattle.

Not only does the Claggett Farm forgo toxic pesticides and herbicides, it also features a diverse ecosystem to control pests. According to Carrie Vaughn, vegetable production manager, the property includes a lot of woodlands and hedges, as well as flowering plants, in

order to create a balance of insects, bacteria, fungus, and "all other kinds of critters" that normally appear in an ecosystem.

"There is no one pest that can take over," says Vaughn. "The ecosystem keeps a balance as pests check each other."

Moreover, the tilled fields are arranged in a way that limits runoff, and plentiful surrounding grasses filter that runoff before it reaches nearby streams. The growing fields are also laid perpendicular to the slopes to help reduce erosion.

To remain eco-friendly through harvest time and beyond, the farm also participates in a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Program. This initiative helps farmers sell their products locally to limit the carbon emissions associated with hauling goods far out of the region.

GREEN EVEN TASTES GOOD

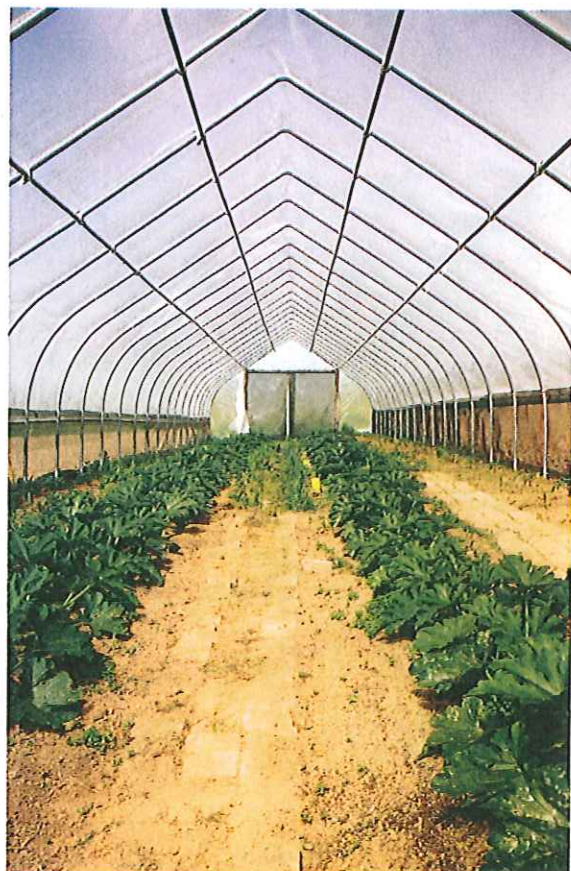
Going green isn't only virtuous—it can also be delicious. Opened in 2007,

Saphron in Prince Frederick serves Low Country cuisine and heartily embraces green practices.

According to owner Charleen Obal, the restaurant's biggest green initiative has been its commitment to offering food grown locally. Having grown up on a farm in the Netherlands, Obal still feels connected to the agricultural lifestyle.

Prior to opening her restaurant, in fact, she would visit area farmers markets and talk about her plans. Soon, the environmentally conscious restaurateur was able to develop relationships with like-minded farmers. Not surprisingly, it's these farmers' goods which now grace the menu at Saphron. The restaurant also recycles glass bottles and sells used cooking oil to a company that converts it into biodiesel.

"Going green is a new word, but when I was growing up, we didn't have a choice but to be green," says Obal. "Now, people are realizing how important it is." 🌻



The Claggett Farm in Upper Marlboro is very eco-friendly.