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Poinciana Royale Reminds Us Green Is All About "The People"

Achieving Green: It's More Than Energy Conservation

Poinciana Royale Reminds Us Green Is All About “The People”

Sometimes, we forget that the green buildings we are building are for people. If you were to ask Jeff Shetterly of Reliance Housing Foundation in Ashville, North Carolina, what the most important factor in achieving a Florida Green Building Coalition Platinum certification was, he'd tell you it was the commitment of his team. That's because he had three committed partners for the design and construction of Poinciana Royale, a low-income apartment community for people infected with HIV/AIDS in Key West, Florida.

Teamwork and Commitment

Partner number one was Robert Walker, Executive Director of AIDS Help, Inc. in Key West. It was his vision, more than seven years ago, to provide healthy and efficient housing for many of his constituents who qualified as low-income or very low-income individuals.

Partner number two was Keith Sockaloski, project manager for the builder, Coastal Construction, out of Miami, who coordinated construction activities with the dozens of on-site trades. Partner number three was Dr. Jennifer Languell, president and owner of Trifecta Construction Solutions, a green building consultancy in Fort Myers, who in many

respects, played the role of teacher.

“The team we assembled embraced the importance of building healthier, sustainable housing for the residents of Poinciana Royale. Sustainability is at the core of our mission at Reliance Housing, and we needed to have partners who were just as committed as we were to that goal,” Shetterly said. As co-developer with AIDS Help, Reliance arranged funding for the \$13.6 million project through the Florida Housing Finance Corporation.

Education and Advance Planning Are the Keys

Languell said that advance planning and design at Poinciana Royale was a major factor in the project's success. “Too often, building green is a second thought with building owners and contractors. But when you plan for it from the beginning, it's easier to manage and less costly to produce,” she said. During the design process, Languell worked to create energy





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models of the building to optimize the energy performance. The bid documents and specifications included all of the targeted green features. “Even with all of the planning,” Languell recalls, “many of the subcontractors looked petrified at the kick off meeting. For many of them, it was their first green project.” There were more than 25 people at the project’s first planning meeting where Shetterly, Sockalski and Languell laid out the green building parameters for Poinciana Royale. Sockaloski said the meeting helped everyone begin to see how all the green pieces would fit together. “Trades are great at focusing on their job, but we wanted to help them also understand how everything green was going to fit together, how

it would be integrated,” he said.

This project was genuinely a learning experience for all of those involved. The advance energy modeling identified a third-story unit with south- and west-facing walls as the most challenging unit for achieving Florida Green Building Coalition (FGBC) platinum-level energy efficiency guidelines. The units at the Poinciana Royale project have an average HERS rating of 65, are Energy Star Certified, and all achieved FGBC platinum certification.

Performance Testing

Languell also admitted that not everything can be solved with advance planning. “Buildings like this have hun-

dreds of different components, and it takes a team effort to successfully complete them. She noted specifically three instances. She recalls, “I had put the duct testing equipment in a unit on the second floor and headed up to the third floor to start inspections. I ran into the HVAC contractor and gave him a heads up that we would be testing his ductwork and he responded, I know, I saw the equipment. It made me laugh because by the second site visit, they already knew the equipment. Second, a huge lesson learned was phasing of the project. The ductwork was tight, the worst of the 50 units had duct leakage at less than 1.5 percent, but without smoke tests at midpoint, this would not have



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been the case. In units where the sprinkler system piping was installed prior to the ductwork, the ducts were perfect, however, in units where the sprinklers were installed after the ducts, we found gaping penetrations in the ducts. These were often on the back side of the ducts and would never have been found without the smoke tests. Third, the owners had requested Energy Star and FGBC certification, however, upon a site inspection, one of them told the contractor he had the wrong equipment. After a frantic phone call, I realized the equipment he wanted needed to be 0.3 percent more efficient than the equipment that was specified—the difference between energy star qualifications and

tax credit qualifications, she said. The team ordered new units.

There are always additional costs associated with building green, but with advance planning, Sockaloski said the team was able to better manage those costs and deliver a building that will be good for the environment and good for its residents. Many of the high efficiency features also have federal tax incentives, which help minimize the initial cost of construction while providing long-term savings for the occupants.

At impromptu "tool box" meetings Languell said she could accomplish a good deal of green education with the contractors. "In the end, they genuinely wanted to know how well they were do-

ing in accomplishing their tasks. There were hundreds of people on this site and it later occurred to me these were the new green jobs everyone was talking about," she said.

Poinciana Royale welcomed its first residents on May 19, 2011. For Jeff Shetterly and Robert Walker, it was a reason to celebrate. "I believe that more and more companies and builders are starting to recognize the importance of building in a more sustainable manner," Shetterly said. "It's a new paradigm for a lot of companies, but it's also the right thing to do. Not only for the environment, but in this case, for the low-income people who benefit from it." 🌍

