

A design for environmentally friendly building

By CAROL WEIR
The Island Packet

A mammoth building is under construction on Hilton Head's Main Street near the hospital, but its impact on the environment is actually quite small. The building is interior design firm J Banks Design Group's new headquarters, and it will embody the building industry's best effort to protect the planet.

The two-story building will be the first LEED certified building on Hilton Head Island, said Joni Vanderslice, owner and president of J Banks Design Group.

Sponsored by the US Green Building Council (USGBC), LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, and is a suite of standards for environmentally sustainable construction. Once certified, the J Banks headquarters will be one of only 10 LEED commercial buildings in South Carolina.

Opening this summer, the \$3.9 million building will house the company's residential and commercial designers, retail shop, warehouse, studio, showroom for the J. Banks furniture line and new gift boutique. The gift store and bridal registry will include a selection of pre-wrapped accessories and appointments from Italy, Mexico and other countries.

J Banks is currently designing a fractional-ownership resort in Tuscany, Italy, and some of the items in the gift shop will be made by artisans who live near the project. Two tenants — a flooring company and a gourmet take-out and catering business — will rent space in the new building, Vanderslice said.

A large, well-appointed conference room on the second floor will be available for rent by local groups for private parties and business events, she said. J Banks will host design seminars in this space.

Vanderslice said the environment has been a priority since she started planning her company's move three years ago.

"My first child was born with se-



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J Banks Design Group's new 18,000-square-foot headquarters, designed by Hilton Head Island architect Tom Parker, has a copper roof and will be the first LEED certified building on Hilton Head Island. BELOW: Joni Vanderslice, owner and president of J Banks Design Group.

vere allergies, and because of that we built a 'healthy house' in Spanish Wells," she said, noting that many of the building industry's recommendations for reducing allergens are also environmentally friendly.

"In our new building, we want to create a good, safe, healthy environment where people can use their gifts," Vanderslice said.

Now, the 34 people on the J Banks staff work out of four rented buildings and have run out of space. Vanderslice said she's looking forward to centralizing operations.

The team creating the new building includes Hilton Head architect Tom Parker, builder Joe Frazier and site engineers Ward Edwards of Bluffton. The plumbing, mechanical and electrical engineering was done by DWG Engineers of Savannah.

"None of us (except DWG) had ever done anything with LEED before," Vanderslice said, adding that she brought in an expert from the University of Florida to give the team a seminar about LEED design. From him, the islanders learned that many of the site planning techniques mandated by the LEED program have been used for



years on Hilton Head. For example, LEED-approved landscaping consists of local, native and drought tolerant plants, and parking spaces are made of permeable pavers, reducing storm water runoff.

Tom Parker of Lee & Parker Associates has worked with Vanderslice on about 20 design projects over the last

two decades. This is his first LEED certified building, and he is studying to earn LEED certification.

Parker called the chance to work with his friend on a LEED building "a great opportunity." He said the LEED program is "a ton of extra paper work and documentation," but added, "we knew that going into it."

The LEED program mandates lots of daylight, and specially constructed shelves must be installed near windows to diffuse natural light. Only a certain amount of total wattage is permitted. Because many of the light fixtures compatible with the LEED program were "very utilitarian," Vanderslice said, "We designed our own and had them made."

The construction project has started a ripple effect within J Banks, reflecting shifts in the design and construction industries. The company now has its own LEED certified consultant, staff designer Anna Gustafson. As part of her certification requirements, she designed a recycling plan for the new building.

Anna Ruby, vice president of creative for J. Banks Design Group, said the firm is seeing more clients asking

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Other environmental construction choices at the new building:

- Carpeting made from recycled plastic
- LEED certified low-output faucets and toilets
- A large skylight
- All paints, adhesives and coatings are low-VOC or VOC-free, meaning they don't emit harmful chemicals.
- Trees harvested from the site will be used for trim and paneling inside
- Heart pine timbers harvested from a barn will be painted and used for flooring.
- Designated parking spaces for hybrid vehicles.
- The building also will have a bike rack and showers to encourage employees to pedal to work.

for green products and designs for their homes.

"It's more the younger generation," she said.