

The Challenging Task of Teaching Green



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This is the last in a series of four articles that began in the November/December 2006 issue of Stone, Sand & Gravel REVIEW.

A growing and significant force in the construction industry is going to impact product manufacturers and suppliers and compel them to learn, adapt and teach in order to survive and thrive. That force — referred to in terms such as “green building,” “sustainable building” or “environmentally friendly building” — will create a considerable level of pressure on stone industry organizations as they try to understand and adjust to its environmentally responsible concepts and construction techniques.

Educational programs on how to use stone in green buildings will play a pivotal role in helping people inside and outside the stone industry become comfortable and supportive. While the concept and idea of green building seems simple, the realities are complex, and educating oneself — then teaching the various design and construction organizations on the use of stone in green building — presents two distinct and significant challenges for members of the aggregates industry.

Challenge #1: Learn about and embrace sustainable concepts and design.

Developing and conducting green educational opportunities for the aggregates industry will be challeng-

ing, especially since the industry is doing well without such efforts. But, it is important for the industry and its members to embrace and learn about an environmental movement that some describe as “the next industrial revolution.” The stone industry also must understand and accept that environmental and social responsibility is fast becoming a constant and unending part of today’s business functions.

Companies are starting to adopt a “triple bottom line” approach to measure their organizational success by expanding the traditional reporting methods to take into account not just financial objectives, but also environmental and social outcomes. For example, Interface — a leader in design, production and sales of carpet and a leading manufacturer and



The revitalized Flat Ledge quarry site stands as evidence that former extraction sites can provide a unique setting with abundant natural beauty. Photo by Leslie D. Bartlett.

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marketer of broadloom carpet, panel fabrics and upholstery fabrics — envisions becoming the world's first environmentally restorative company by 2020. By learning and living the concepts of sustainability, Interface states that "more people are buying our products because they buy our way of thinking."

Another company that embraces a triple bottom line approach to conducting business is Herman Miller. This company creates remarkable places to work through the design, manufacture and distribution of home and office furniture, various interior products and related workplace services. Herman Miller, an industry leader in environmentally responsible product design and manufacturing, searches to develop innovative solutions to real needs in working, healing, learning and living environments.

To survive and outlast industry competitors, companies must become adaptive and flexible to forces that require them to do something different in order to maintain their existence. Simply put, companies today will be in a better position to thrive if they become adept at the concepts of green building and design. Talking about the inclusion of stone into green buildings can be relatively easy, but the process of learning and practicing green itself can be excruciatingly difficult and uncomfortable. Why is this difficult? Change means giving something up, and that something is the status quo. Many stone companies and organizations have done things

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the same way repeatedly, and in most cases, they have been very successful in doing so. Any change to the status quo that affects the current way of doing business will be met with doubt and anxiety, if not outright resistance, unless proper education and training programs are developed.

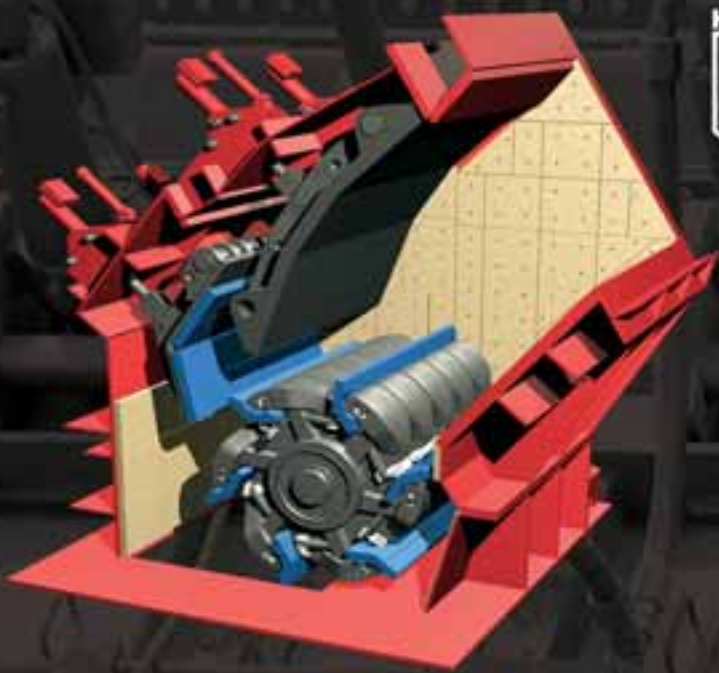
Since national associations help direct the activities within their membership groups to achieve the associations' overall objectives, their commitment to educate the industry on the concepts of green building is

imperative to eliminate or minimize doubt and anxiety levels. National associations are expected to lead the stone industry and help it remain competitive. With their ability to monitor, gather and analyze vital and pertinent information from inside and outside the industry, they are in the best position to provide educational means on sustainable design and construction.

But, what type of educational programs? Educational psychologists generally agree that we learn and remember 80 percent of what we experience or practice, versus only 10 percent to 20 percent of what we read or hear. As such, workshops and study tours could provide a superb hands-on opportunity for stone industry members to learn about building green. Developing new educational workshops and programs with an emphasis on basic fundamental green concepts, practical applications and sustainable strategies will be an important aspect of affecting change in the stone industry. In addition, having participants from the various green institutes and associations, and from a variety of disciplines within the sustainable community, would greatly enrich any educational experience by providing multiple viewpoints and approaches on how stone supports green building.

Why learn and embrace the concepts of green building? According to a study by the Natural Marketing Institute, almost 90 percent of the U.S. population states that it is important for companies not just to be profitable,





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but to be mindful of their impact on the environment and society. The same study found that more than 70 percent of consumers indicate that knowing a company is mindful of their impact on the environment and society makes them more likely to buy their products or services. Times are changing. Companies that learn about green and then integrate environmental considerations into their business strategy and operation will create new market opportunities for themselves. In a survey asking architects and designers about the use of stone in green buildings the question was asked, "How likely would you be to use a product from a company that has a more proactive approach to sustainability?" Not surprisingly, 90 percent of the respondents said they would "most likely" or "absolutely" use that company's products.

Challenge #2: Develop programs to educate outside interests on stone and sustainable design.

Today, it is imperative for trade associations to look frequently at their educational programs in relation to growing trends that could affect their members' business and methods of operation. In addition to training within the stone industry, creating the educational opportunities that aid the transfer of knowledge about stone from the stone industry to other industries will help people outside the stone industry understand and explore the connection between stone and green building design and construction. We are now in the midst of a construc-

tion revolution where people, ideas and resources are better connected, resulting in innovative products and services. This revolution provides an opening for the stone industry to collaborate with green advocates and organizations to help develop sustainable practices, create new products and teach the benefits of using stone to support sustainable design.

Teaching green must be a shared responsibility among stone trade associations and their members. The industry has the responsibility for providing educational leadership and for helping initiate and manage its educational initiatives on sustainability. Therefore, developing educational opportunities for architects, designers and contractors will be of tremendous value. Once testing and research on stone have been initiated, conducted and found to support green building, it will be up to members of the stone industry to put those findings into educational programs for the design and construction communities. There are numerous educational avenues and opportunities through organizations such as the American Institute of Architects, American Society of Landscape Architects and the U.S. Green Building Council. These organizations would surely welcome continuing educational programs for their members.

Change is difficult, but necessary

Change can be difficult for any industry, even when such change is of great benefit. Organizational

change experts agree that part of being a successful organization or industry is maintaining the ability to be open to new ways of doing business. But being amenable to change is not enough by itself. Industry leaders also must ensure that adequate training and education are implemented in conjunction with any new initiative. Like any other industry, the stone industry must be open to change and willing to educate itself and others if it is going to adapt to and succeed at becoming an integral part of the green building movement.

If the use of stone in green buildings is going to be promoted to the design and construction communities, then it is up to the local, regional and national leaders of the stone industry to educate and support architects, designers and builders about the economic benefit of natural stone and how it can be utilized in an environmentally responsible manner. Doing so will enhance the appeal and therefore the use of stone in the rapidly growing green building movement. In addition, stone industry professionals who have a working knowledge of sustainable business practices will enhance the value of their companies by ensuring that they retain or enhance a competitive edge. ■

The NSSGA Sustainability Task Force has developed a definition of sustainability for the association and a draft policy statement. The task force is in the process of briefing all NSSGA divisions and developing an implementation strategy.

