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Hampton Inn construction proves it's easy to be green

Kermit the Frog, one of the greatest actors of all time, sang "It's Not Easy Being Green," but the ongoing Hampton Inn construction project in Big Flats is proving just the opposite.

When the 72-room hotel opens later this year, it will be the newest and the greenest hotel in the Elmira-Corning-Watkins Glen triangle.

The hotel's construction plans are guided by building standards shaped by Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, which was developed by the U.S. Green Building Council. The standards measure how well the new building performs in terms of energy savings, water efficiency, carbon dioxide emission reduction, improved indoor environmental quality, stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts.

Points are awarded to a new building based on how the structure performs in those five areas, says Brendalynn Keefer, operations director at the neighboring Hilton Garden Inn. Both facilities share the same owners, L Enterprises of Big Flats and the Milnes Companies of Tunkhannock, Pa.

Hampton Inns, a part of the Hilton hotel chain, is marketed to leisure travelers. The brand's bread and butter are groups and families. The Big Flats location, near Arnot Road and Colonial Drive, broke ground in September and is scheduled for a November opening. It will employ about 25 part- and full-time workers, says Debby Cacala, Hilton Garden Inn's marketing and sales director.

For a minute, let's push aside the debate over whether that area of Chemung County - already home to the 70-room Country Inn & Suites, the 119-room Hilton Garden Inn and the prospective location of an 83-room Candlewood Suites - needs more hotel rooms. Let's instead focus on how the construction of the new Hampton Inn is making it easy for the building to be green. (Sorry, Kermit.)

The hotel's design includes 36 geothermal wells dug to a depth of 400 feet. Geothermal wells extract energy from the earth's heat and can be used to heat or cool the hotel and the water it uses.

The window glass includes a material that reflects the sun's rays during the summer and helps keep the hotel's interior cooler. During the winter, when the sun's angle in the sky is lower, the rays pass through the specialty glass and help heat the interior. Along that same line, the hotel's roof will be finished with a white-colored material that will reflect the sun's rays.

The new hotel's laundry system will be equipped with an ozone injection system, Keefer says, that will allow laundry to be washed in cooler water and take less time to dry. The hotel rooms will be equipped with dual-flush toilets, which feature two push buttons that regulate the amount of water used to flush the bowl.

LEED standards mandate that all construction supplies be purchased from vendors with a 500-mile radius, a stipulation intended to reduce the carbon footprint of delivery vehicles. The standards also regulate how the construction materials are to be separated and disposed of on-site.

LEED also encourages the use of recycled products whenever possible. And in the case of the new hotel, the carpets in the common areas - all made from recycled materials - will be installed in 20-inch squares, instead of one continuous piece. That way, says Cacala, a soiled or worn section of carpet

can be replaced without having to install a new carpet.

The hotel's grounds will be landscaped, but the landscaping will not include an irrigation system. Ground water and Mother Nature will provide the necessary moisture. During the construction phase, workers are allowed to smoke cigarettes in a specific area but when the hotel opens, it will be completely smoke-free.

Building "green" adds an estimated 20 percent to 30 percent to the overall cost of the project, says Milnes Companies spokeswoman Angela Plantz. But those costs are all up-front and the reduced energy usage over the life of the building will offset those costs through reduced utility bills, she explained.

The owners also have the satisfaction of helping to lead the way to energy independence by building more energy efficient buildings.

Two final questions.

Why does it cost more to do the right thing? And, why aren't "green" commercial buildings eligible for the same tax credits and other incentives afforded to private homeowners who use similar building methods for their residences?
