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Wauna's Scappoose branch achieves LEED Silver Certification

Wauna Federal Credit Union's members have enjoyed community focused service since a group of paper mill employees founded the financial institution 44 years ago. Now the organization's initiative to reduce, reuse and recycle steps up to the next level with LEED certification in its one year old Scappoose branch.

The credit union's "Go Green Checking" program encouraging electronic banking is known to consumers but Wauna's internal green initiative has been four years in the making. While lights and windows were being replaced in other branches to reduce energy usage, the board approved building a green facility in Scappoose in December, 2008.

"We feel it's our responsibility as a local business to do the right thing for our community, to be conscientious and lead by example," noted Debi Smiley, Executive Vice President & Chief Operations Officer. Smiley was responsible for oversight of the detailed construction project which focused on, among other initiatives, lighting, heating and grounds maintenance, all resulting in energy efficiencies.

Smiley thinks visitors might find the lighting in the credit union to be interesting. Energy usage varies depending on how much natural light is outside. She also noted the bioswell project that directs parking lot moisture to an organic filtration system through sand and gravel, into plant roots that absorb the oils and returns the water to a clean format.

A sophisticated heating operation includes gas and electric systems. The warming process starts with gas, saving electricity. The credit union agreed to purchase 35 percent of its energy as wind power from the customer-owned Columbia River People's Utility District (PUD), Smiley added.

The LEED certification was granted in August, 2011, nine months after the branch opened. The credit union exceeded its own initial plan of achieving LEED certification, taking the next step to achieve Silver status.

Engineers and architects working on the project estimate an eventual energy savings to Wauna of 16,307 kilowatts a year. While the return on investment in terms of energy savings is still being analyzed, it is already apparent with the team, Smiley said, noting employees are proud.

"When you put a facility such as this together, the working environment is more comfortable, and they have pride working in an energy conscious facility," she said, adding service reports are consistently of high caliber.

The LEED Silver plaque unveiling ceremony on December 14th is an invitation only event, but members and the public have been invited to visit the branch at any time.