

WHAT'S WORKING WEDNESDAYS
LEED CERTIFICATION
GARY PFEIFER, MERCURY RIDGE
January 22, 2014

George Oxx, Executive Director of Mercy Ridge, explained that Mercy Ridge is a retirement community in Baltimore County that offers independent and assisted living. Mercy Ridge was developed by the Archdiocese of Baltimore and Mercy Health and is located on the campus of Stella Maris, where skilled nursing is provided. He introduced Gary Pfeifer, who has been the Director of Facilities at Mercy Ridge for thirteen years.

Gary Pfeifer, a long-time member of the International Facility Management Association, admits he was slow to become engaged with green initiatives. But, after having attended several workshops and reading *The Triple Bottom Line*, he began to study the ways in which social, financial and environment impact could work together in a sustainable way.

He introduced the idea of LEED certification to the senior team at Mercy Ridge in 2008 and it was embraced for several reasons:

- Marketing advantages – there were no other LEED certified communities at that time, and a belief that tomorrow's residents care about sustainability
- Financial advantages – short term investments for longer term savings
- Sustainability – it's the right thing to do for the environment and the community

They hired consulting group CQI Associates and worked with them throughout 2009 and 2010. By 2011 Mercy Ridge applied for and obtained LEED certification. Mercy Ridge, like many organizations, was actually doing many things that counted toward LEED certification, but hadn't documented them.

Approximate costs for the process included: \$15,000 for the LEED certification process itself; \$15,000 for the consultants; \$15,000 for the commissioning of systems; and limited additional direct costs. Apart from that, many of the specific projects they undertook increased efficiency so much that they paid for themselves very quickly. Examples include:

- Installation of hand dryers for an annual savings of \$4,500
- Sensor switch installation saves them \$6,800/ year and the payback was less than a year
- A garage retrofit payback period was 1.5 years and then generated savings beyond that
- Energy savings overall have been significant: a reduction in 100,000 kilowatt hours per year
- Landfill waste has also been reduced through recycling efforts- from 209 tons at the start down to 161 tons currently

Gary advises that all organizations, no matter how old their buildings, can take advantage of "low hanging fruit" – initiatives that require a small investment but have a big return. He also urged people to seek out and take advantage of energy company rebates.

In answer to questions from participants, Gary responded:

- Buildings of any age can improve their environmental quotient.
- Residents were cheerleaders for the effort. They quickly grasped the environmental and financial benefits. Many of the Depression era residents particularly resonated with the effort.
- Support from the top is critical as is consistency to help staff get on board.
- Good ways to move toward greater sustainability are:
 - Use the LEED template for ideas
 - The International Facility Management Association website has resources
 - Mercy Ridge found the investment in consultants to have a good return

In sum, reducing the carbon footprint really does accrue to a Triple Bottom Line!

For more information, contact Gary Pfeifer at gpfeifer@mercyridge.com.