

## Diplomat

# EDUCATION

A Special Section of The Washington Diplomat January 2011



PHOTO: STODDERT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / EHRENKRANTZ, ECKSTUT & KUHN ARCHITECTS

# District of Eco-Columbia

D.C. Public Schools  
Bloom with Green  
Rejuvenation

by Carolyn Cosmos

"Students are very proud of the fact they're going to school in a nice new place. They love it," said Marjorie Cuthbert, principal of Stoddert Elementary, a public school situated on six acres in D.C.'s Glover Park neighborhood.

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INSIDE: The Fulbright Program continues to be the pinnacle of the U.S. government's educational exchange with the world. PAGE 26



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PHOTO: D.C. OFFICE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION FACILITIES MODERNIZATION

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Expanded and modernized, Stoddert reopened last fall. Flooded with natural light, this spectacular school now has two green garden-topped roofs that help keep students cool, along with a white roof to reflect heat, an underground geothermal heating and cooling system, state-of-the-art teaching tools, and a "natural playground" with turned-over tree stumps.

An officially certified green building, Stoddert is going for the Gold, the second highest LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) environmental rating given by the U.S. Green Building Council to sustainable school buildings in the United States.

Students seem eager to show off their eco-friendly school. Teams give building tours that start at an electronic kiosk in the lobby. It automatically updates viewers on the school's energy use, displaying a stream of data that can be pulled up in classrooms for lessons or even seen at home. The building's "engagement" with the educational process is one of the school's favorite new features for Stoddert architect Sean O'Donnell, who's also proud of the abundance of natural light.

Cuthbert, Stoddert's soft-spoken principal, is a national leader in developing ways to use green buildings to teach science and other subjects, while also infusing this learning with a global perspective. Stoddert has students from 20 countries speaking 25 languages. It also takes students from Bolling Air Force Base who "have traveled all over," Cuthbert notes, saying the resulting diversity means "we have the opportunity to relate issues not only to this country but to the world."

**Woodrow Wilson Senior High School** has an expansive new aquatic center for students and the general public that includes an Olympic-size competition pool — part of a \$3.5 billion, 15-year facilities modernization campaign aimed at D.C. Public Schools.

As impressive as it is, Stoddert is only a small part of the public school system's \$3.5 billion, 15-year facilities modernization agenda aimed at all 143 schools in the District — many in notorious states of disrepair until they were tackled with repair "blitzes" launched by a new 2007 management team. And as much as recently departed D.C. Schools Chancellor Michelle Rhee received national recognition — along with both praise and scorn at the local level — for her controversial drive to overhaul the city's ailing school system by removing bad teachers and fixing schools badly in need of repair, D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) has quietly continued another campaign that has received far less notice but is no less significant: a head-to-toe eco-conscious overhaul.

Today, 23 green modernization projects are finished or in progress at DCPS, with design and construction awards steadily rolling in as well. Phelps High School, located above Benning Road in Northeast, Hyde-Addison Elementary School, and Foggy Bottom's School Without Walls have all garnered recent accolades and honors for building and design.

But the greening isn't always grand. DCPS facilities receiving even minor makeovers are variously provided light sensors that know when a room is empty and can turn the lights off, for instance, or dual-flush toilets that save water, paint that doesn't emit contaminants, or new playgrounds and fields.

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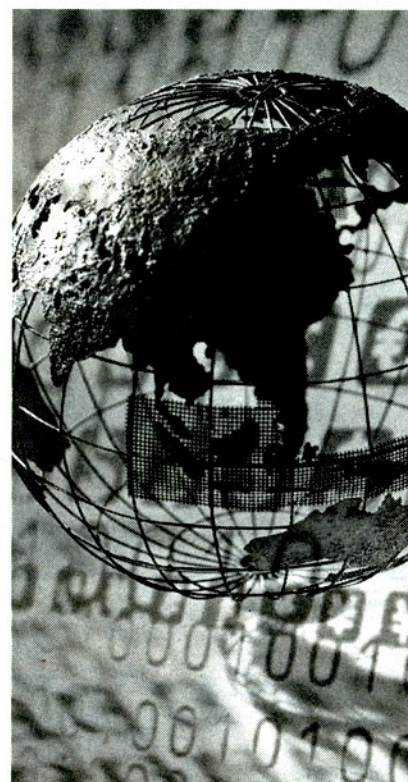


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“If you change the quality of the environment, change the way public spaces are built, you can uplift people. Going into one of our green schools every day, that raises the spirits of the kids.”

— ALLEN Y. LEW, director of the D.C. Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization

In short, the District has “one of the most significant and comprehensive” building programs of its kind in the country. Rachel Gutter, director of the U.S. Green Building Council’s Center for Green Schools, told *The Washington Diplomat*. Of the 133,000 schools in the United States, only 2,000 are interested in LEED certification, while roughly 400 have one of its Silver, Gold or Platinum environmental ratings, making D.C. “a leader among leaders,” Gutter said.

There are several drivers behind this local green building boom. First and foremost, a 2006 D.C. law makes green construction of both public and private buildings, if they’re large enough, mandatory. Other jurisdictions are now doing the same thing through laws, regulations or official encouragement, including Montgomery County and Baltimore County in Maryland, as well as New York City and, starting in 2011, the entire state of California.

A second driver: Green construction combines good citizenship with economic common sense. According to the U.S. Green Building Council, the sustainable building design and construction industry has grown by 50 percent in the last two years, defying the global recession. In fact, the nonprofit cites a study projecting that sustainable buildings, between 2009 and 2013, will pump \$55.4 billion into the American economy and create or save 7.9 million U.S. jobs.



PHOTO: D.C. OFFICE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION FACILITIES MODERNIZATION

D.C. Public Schools (DCPS) has become a national leader in environmentally sustainable building practices thanks in large part to Allen Y. Lew, former chief executive of the D.C. Sports and Entertainment Commission who in 2007 took up the task of modernizing all 143 public schools in the District — many in notorious states of disrepair.

A third push is the Green Building Council’s LEED system of voluntary ratings, which was extended to schools in 2007. It awards points in seven categories, encouraging water and energy efficiency, retention of older buildings, recycling, community use of school buildings, and design innovation. Buildings seek to rack up

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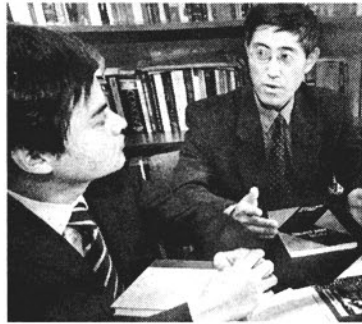
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points to get certification or Silver, Gold, or Platinum LEED ratings that can in turn make a property more valuable.

But how did D.C.'s school building project grow so big so fast in the face of longstanding failures that have made it one of the worst-performing school systems in the nation for years? The secret weapon is a man who also oversaw construction of the city's new Nationals ballpark: Allen Y. Lew, former chief executive of the D.C. Sports and Entertainment Commission who also managed construction of the Washington Convention Center. In 2007, then D.C. Mayor Adrian Fenty persuaded Lew to tackle school upgrades.

He's efficient. He's passionate. He's repaired 129 D.C. schools. And he doesn't want to be called a bureaucrat even though he's officially director of the Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization (OPEFM). Lew's private sector management model translates into "a can-do attitude, a focus on solutions," and an emphasis on teamwork, he told *The Diplomat* in an interview. "We're not a government agency. We're 95 percent private," he noted.

In fact, he's done such a good job at OPEFM that newly elected D.C. Mayor Vincent Gray recently tapped Lew to be the new city administrator.

"I hold myself and [my team] to my wife's standard when she calls a plumber: She expects them to fix it now, not in five months," Lew said, adding that he wants D.C. schools to "exceed standard requirements. We're looking to Gold LEED for many of our schools. I want to build something that will last."

In addition to his big-picture vision, Lew relishes the details of his craft. In the School Without Walls project, "the community wanted to retain the [Victorian] wood, so we took wood out of the old closets" and incorporated

that into the renovations. In the H.D. Woodson High School modernization, "we restored the wrought-iron railings and kept ornate column details. Elsewhere, we're ripping out rubber and vinyl and reintroducing terrazzo flooring. Beautiful! It lasts forever," Lew beamed.

Other examples of the modernization campaign abound throughout the city: friendly rain gardens at Brent Elementary and Coolidge High School that control storm-water runoff; on-site health clinics at Coolidge, Ballou and Woodson high schools; Woodson also gets a green roof, a "gray water" rain runoff system to flush toilets, and better accommodations for science, technology, engineering and math studies.

That's just the tip of the green iceberg: Janney Elementary in Northwest is going geothermal. Walker-Jones Elementary, located near a housing project, was torn down to make way for a state-of-the-art grade school that includes a large public library, recreation center, and spaces for community programs. And it has a green roof. Meanwhile, Woodrow Wilson Senior High School has a spectacular new aquatic center for students and the general public that includes an Olympic-size competition pool, bleachers for spectators, and a second pool just for recreation. Capitol Hill's Eastern Senior High has a cyber café and a lab dedicated to training emergency medical technicians (EMTs). And the new Anacostia Senior High School will get the latest in educational technology, a rain-water harvesting system and, Lew hopes, LEED Gold certification.

Major architectural firms have joined Lew's mission. For instance, the School Without Walls and Stoddert modernizations are the work of EE&K architects. "We were founded 50 years ago to design schools ... and preservation is part of our practice," said architect and LEED expert Sean O'Donnell, who's behind some of D.C.'s design awards.

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A student member of the "energy patrol" explains how each new state-of-the-art classroom at Stoddert Elementary School has wireless Internet connections, interactive electronic "whiteboards" and natural features such as additional sunlight that have made the school — also pictured on page 21 — a green-certified building.



PHOTO: STODDERT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

part of much larger sustainable building movement sweeping the country, and the world. Despite relative inaction on climate change at the federal level, city and state governments are pushing ahead with major eco-makeovers.

Locally, the Virginia Municipal League, an organization of municipal governments in the state, is sponsoring "green challenges" for the state's public and private schools. Maryland's green schools list is long. Montgomery County mandates school greening measures, and the state's board of education is working on an "environmental literacy" requirement for all high school graduates.

The trends mirror developments taking place throughout the region's many private schools, who also track D.C.'s green progress, according to Myra McGovern, director of public information for the National Association of Independent Schools. Like their public counterparts, private schools are also tackling an array of green initiatives, including building renovations, boosting energy efficiency, sourcing more food locally, creating campus gardens, and simply incorporating sustainability into their mission statements and strategic plans (also see "Gold Stars for Going

Green: Area Schools Help Themselves While Helping the Environment" in the November 2008 issue of *The Washington Diplomat*).

As examples of this effort, McGovern cites the third annual Students 4 Sustainability Conference held in November at St. Stephen's and St. Agnes School in Alexandria, Va., and the "Day School Green Challenge" held by three private schools that engaged 13 local independent schools in a race to see which ones could most improve school recycling and energy use. The winners? Maret School, Roland Park Country School, Bryn Mawr, Bullis, the Hill School, Burgundy Farm Country Day, and the Potomac School.

All of these local endeavors are a reflection of a growing global sustainable building movement. The World Health Organization, for example, has an initiative to encourage "health-promoting schools," and the United Nations Environment Program sponsored 10 green-building conferences around the world in 2010. A key international coordinating body, the World Green Building Council, formally set up in 2002, now has "Green Councils" in 70 countries throughout the planet. The newest enterprise? The GLOBE

Alliance (Global Leadership in Our Built Environment) formed in November in Chicago, by the U.S. Green Building Council and its World Green Building Council counterpart.

One of the keynote speakers at that Chicago founding was the U.S. Ambassador to Finland, Bruce Oreck, who is also the leader of a group of 50 U.S. embassies dedicated to increasing embassy energy efficiency and reducing cost. Nicholas Kuchova, a senior officer with the U.S. Embassy in Helsinki, told us by e-mail that Ambassador Oreck was invited to Chicago to share his belief that environmental solutions will be driven by "the private sector, people with ideas and the willingness to push for the new."

People like Allen Lew. "If you change the quality of the environment, change the way public spaces are built, you can uplift people. Going into one of our green schools every day, that raises

the spirits of the kids," Lew said.

It also raises some adults' spirits. "We have in D.C. people who grew up going to certain of our older schools," Lew said. "I've seen them come back to the reopening of a rebuilt school or new athletic field. They break into tears — of joy."

Gutter of the Center for Green Schools would like to offer that emotion to others. To do it, the center has gathered committee members from PTAs and other groups, allied with education officials across the country, and brought in "people who get things done," such as architects, builders, educators and students at universities, she said. "We have an ambitious mission to see everyone in the country in a green school within a generation."

Carolyn Cosmos is a contributing writer for *The Washington Diplomat*.

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