

## **A Green Light Shines at the Lucy School** by Jeff Feldman

In a quiet hollow at the foot of South Mountain, young children explore, discover, learn and play among fields where crops once grew. This is the Lucy School, a 17-acre farm turned arts-integrated education center. Upon arriving at the school, one is greeted by vistas of open fields, a large pond fed by a flowing waterfall, a nice-sized garden patch, small clusters of woods and a prominent red barn. Some schools just have a magical energy about them and this is one such special place. Lucy, from *luce*, the Italian for light, quite simply shines with the spirit of child-centered learning.

And the light that is the Lucy School glows quite a bit greener these days. At the urging of parents, Lucy recently reached beyond their original pre-school scope to include a curriculum for Kindergarten to Second Grade. Needing additional space to accommodate this expansion, the school began construction of a new classroom building. Seeking to create an innovative learning environment, and with both human and planetary health in mind, Lucy decided to go green with this new building, designing and constructing it in accordance with the US Green Building Council's LEED Program. "There was no other choice," says Dr. Victoria Brown, co-founder and Director of the school, "Tying in to the environment is just what we do here." The two-story facility, complete with solar power, living roof, geothermal heating and cooling, LED lighting and a host of other green features is beautiful, functional and clearly Earth-friendly.

Dr. Christofer Zachariadis, the other co-founder of the school who served as construction supervisor for the project, shared that he and his building committee of school staff and parents knew little about green design or green building materials when they first embarked down this path. Green building experience was scarce among local builders and subcontractors in the area as well. The school partnered with George Harne of HarneBowen Architects out of Myersville, MD for the design work and contracted with Scott Kelly of Re:Vision Architects out of Philadelphia for guidance on LEED's green performance standards. It was late fall of 2007 when they broke ground on the project, and with a September 2008 start of the new school year as a target for completion, the plans and implementation had to unfold quickly.

Lucy's green classroom building is fronted by a covered entry and walkway, the post and beam frame of which is made from timbers salvaged from an old warehouse in North Carolina. Similar salvaged materials were used throughout the structure. The interior of the building is aglow with natural light from large, high-efficiency windows and solatube skylights. Indoor air quality was a primary consideration in the selection of materials to be used throughout the building. To minimize the offgassing of volatile organic compounds (VOC's), wheatboard and bamboo were selected for the cabinetry, cellulose from recycled paper and a recycled denim product insulate the walls, and mineral-based paints add color to the interior. The floors in the building are cork, bamboo and concrete made with 50% slag or fly ash.

Nicole Aliev, whose two children attend the Lucy School, describes how her kids were made aware of why the building was so special and were included in the story of its construction.

Progress reports came home weekly, and Alieve witnessed a growing sense of pride and ownership within her children. “As a parent, I love how the construction became a learning experience, one that taught the kids to feel responsible for their environment,” she says.

Nature works in cycles and the systemic design of the building mimics this. Rainwater is collected in cisterns and cycled back to the dual-flush toilets. Graywater from sinks and water fountains cycles into irrigation for plants. Stormwater is filtered through rain gardens before cycling back into the groundwater system. And by living and learning with these systems every day, the commonsense wisdom of them cycles forward within the students as well. Dr. Brown shares one student’s questioning of why these green approaches to building are not more common. “Why doesn’t everyone use rainwater to flush toilets?” the student asks. Why indeed.

Visit the Lucy School online at [www.lucyschool.com](http://www.lucyschool.com). For more information on the US Green Building Council and LEED, visit <http://www.usgbc.org>.

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