Villa Lighting thinks globally, acts locally

Consistent with its commitment to urban renewal and sustainability, Villa Lighting has achieved LEED Silver certification of its new headquarters and warehouse. by Jan Niehaus

When Villa Lighting Supply’s revenue spiked at $97.4 million in 2007—up from $72.7 million in 2006—Jack Villa, founder and president of the St. Louis-based lighting distributor, started scouting available 10-acre sites of developable land in the urban core. On the 10.4-acre site that Villa selected now stands a new $12 million, 216,000-square-foot, LEED Silver-certified headquarters and warehouse.

“No one gave Villa’s decision to build in a struggling urban area a second thought,” said Paul Todd Merrill, director of sustainable construction for St. Louis-based Clayco, Villa’s chosen design-build partner. “The Villa name is legendary in the city of St. Louis. For three generations, members of the Villa family have been influential business leaders and served as city aldermen and state representatives.”

The decision to go for LEED certification was almost as easy. “It was a straightforward business decision,” said Steve Barker, Villa’s vice president of sales. “First, a lot of our customers are interested in LEED. Also, we need to practice what we preach about energy-efficient lighting systems and controls. And we were going to spend money for marketing anyway. The building is a show-and-tell piece for us. We have flown in customers from across the country to see it.”

As a marketing tool, the building has proven highly effective, Barker said: “We absolutely have generated new sales as a result of this building. We have T5HO direct and indirect in our office, .58 watts per square foot in the warehouse, and 1.1 watts in the office. Our energy-efficient light fixtures, together with our motion sensors and daylight controls, reduce our energy use for lighting by nearly 50%. Several customers have incorporated the same kind of lighting into their buildings.”

Villa serves a national customer base: “We’ve been fortunate; our client roster includes Walgreens, Target, and Crate & Barrel,” Barker said, which means that St. Louis isn’t Villa’s sole target market.

But it is home, and Villa takes seriously its responsibilities as a community member, as this excerpt from its LEED certification application demonstrates: “Hiring practices within Villa have included outreach to the neighboring communities. To date, 20 employees have been added to the Villa payroll from the regional neighborhood out of a total of 90 full-time employees. This is an area of the city in dire need of economic improvement and Villa is assisting with this support.”

But Villa’s impact reaches even farther than that—beyond employment, urban revival, and the city limits: “With the lighting and controls in our own building, we have eliminated greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to driving 1,462,000 miles each year,” a point that Barker routinely makes in his frequent public presentations.

Villa Lighting is not only a responsible citizen of the city of St. Louis, but also attuned to its role in the larger, global community.

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