

Chatham architect LEEDs the way

By Bill Willcox

For architect Alicia Ravetto, there has never been any question that new buildings should be designed to a high level of energy efficiency.

Ten years ago, in 2002, she became one of the first five LEED Accredited Professionals in North Carolina.

LEED is an abbreviation for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. While architects become accredited, the term is most commonly applied to buildings that are verified as being designed and built in a way that improves energy savings, water efficiency, indoor environmental quality, and CO2 emissions reduction.

Ravetto's commitment to LEED certification has left its mark on Chatham County.

Four years ago, the Board of Commissioners (BOC) asked her to chair the Green Building Task Force.

"I gladly accepted," she said, "because it was an opportunity to start influencing the buildings that the County was getting ready to build and require that they are LEED certified."

The BOC voted to accept the Task Force's recommendation that buildings above a certain size be built to LEED Silver standards. As a result, the new Chatham Community Library and Pollard Middle School were built to those standards.

The policy came up for review last February when the new Board of Commissioners met in a work session.

Ravetto gave an impassioned plea that the policy be maintained.

"LEED is not about the plaque," she said. "It is investing in the future, in our children and citizens, in stopping or delaying the destruction of the natural environment, in learning from nature and being smarter in how we spend our money."

But the BOC wasn't persuaded and ended the policy in a 3-1 vote. Commissioners explained they were very much for energy efficient buildings but the LEED verification process was

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too inflexible and required spending on aspects of construction which would not save money for taxpayers in the long term.

Ravetto is no longer a member of the GBTF but continues to design energy-efficient buildings in the area as an architect.

She still keeps track of one of her early projects in downtown Pittsboro, the RAFI headquarters, which was her first non-residential contract after she started her architecture business in 1997.

She designed the building with good natural lighting, good indoor air quality and natural ventilation. She keeps track of the utility bills and is pleased that the building uses only about one third of the electricity of a typical office in North Carolina and has maintained this level of efficiency for 10 years.

But perhaps the best example of her commitment to green building is her own home in the Red Bud development off of Mt. Gilead Church Road.

In 1996, she and her husband, green builder Paul Konove, constructed a passive solar house oriented to the south with windows that capture the sun's energy in the winter and overhangs that protect the glass in the summer. Concrete floors store the heat that comes into the house. They added solar panels for water heat in 2001 and solar panels to generate electricity in 2007.

The result is a house that is extremely energy efficient. They only pay \$1,000 a year for electricity and gas, compared to \$2400 a year for the average home.

Alicia has been a resident of Chatham County for 20 yrs



Bill Willcox photo

Advocate of energy efficiency . . .

Architect Alicia Ravetto stands outside her energy-efficient home in the Red Bud neighborhood. She has been a longtime advocate of building to LEED standards.