

Queens Ledger

## **Making Environmentally Friendly More Biz Friendly**

Thursday, November 30, 2006

By Shane Miller

It hasn't always been easy making green by being green, but with a little help from legislation passed by the City Council and a growing demand for environmentally friendly, the "green" collar businesses are starting to grow into big industry.

In 2005, the Council passed Local Law 86, which requires new construction projects and renovations that are 25 percent funded with taxpayer dollars use green technology and meet certain Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design, or LEED, standards.

"It's really a landmark bill that will affect \$12 billion in city construction over the next 10 years," said Councilman James Gennaro, who chairs the Council's Environmental Protection Committee. "We are creating a demand for environmentally friendly products and services."

Last week, Gennaro was on a tour of two businesses - one in Long Island City and another in Greenpoint - that stand to benefit from the new requirements. DFB Sales in Queens makes solar shades, while Bettencourt Green Building Supplies and Scrapile in North Brooklyn make furniture and other home products from recycled or natural materials. "We need to link the people designing and building these 'green' buildings with local companies," explained Gennaro, "so we ensure that the money will go back into our local economy."

Scrapile and Bettencourt Green Building Supplies share a small warehouse on Freeman Street in Greenpoint. The first uses an innovative process that takes scrap wood from construction sites and other manufacturers and presses it into blocks. The result is a distinctive multi-layered block that is cut and made into high-end furniture.

"If you look at New York City, it is a great place for waste," said Stephanie Feldman, director of Sustainable Business Development with the Industrial and Technology Assistance Corporation. "And wood waste is really one of the most problematic to deal with."

For instance, Steinway & Sons piano makers in Queens throws away some 65 cubic yards of wood a day, most of it fine wood like mahogany or poplar, that otherwise than not meeting Steinway's high standards is of a high quality.

"It's a tough sell," admits Carlos Selgado, principal of Scrapile. "You are basically going to a fine woodworker and saying, 'can we take a look through your trash.'" There is plenty of it out there for the taking, though. As Matt Berk of Bettencourt explains, the biggest problem isn't quantity, it's one of logistics. "It would be a full-time job just to go around

picking up the product," said Berk. "Our biggest problem is space; we would need a whole other warehouse to store it."

But some think that the legislation could go further. As Richard Cherry, president of the Community Environmental Center, which does green consulting work, the new law doesn't apply to schools or housing, two of the city's biggest construction and renovation areas.

However, Cherry notes, the City Housing Agency has actually taken the lead in green design, using environmentally friendly features in their projects without a legislative mandate. Cherry says the agency just designed, on their own, their first entirely green building in the Bronx. Even so, he thinks that Local Law 86 is a step in the right direction.

"The way we require sprinklers and fire controls, we should require that buildings don't pollute the air," argued Cherry during a phone interview this week. He says that with safety features, developers don't do a cost-benefit analysis like they do with green features, which can increase construction costs by about five to eight percent. "But you get that paid back to you in fuel savings in just a few years," added Cherry.

Cherry said that he works with a lot of non-profits that utilize green design on moral grounds, but that he is noticing a lot of for-profit developers going green now as well. "Marketers are coming to for-profit developers and telling them to use green technology," said Cherry. "I think that consumers will start making demands."

Cherry believes that as more and more requirements are put into place, business opportunities for local green manufacturers are only going to grow. Adam Friedman of the New York Industrial Retention Network agrees. "Sure, the cost of doing business in New York City is a lot greater, but the profits are a lot larger, too," he notes.