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Beach elementary school earns a "green" distinction

Structure built to be safe for environment obtains certification

BY LAUREN ROTH
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VIRGINIA BEACH – The roof isn't the only thing "green" about the rebuilt Hermitage Elementary.

The school, at 1701 Pleasure House Road, is the first elementary school in the state to attain a voluntary environmental certification called Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

With waterless urinals, natural landscaping, recycled materials and energy-saving fixtures, the school qualified for the national certification in October.

The new building replaced the old Hermitage Elementary, a smaller 1964 structure that was demolished. About 560 students had returned to the new school, which opened in April after two years of construction.

To qualify for certification, a new building must document at least 27 of 69 conditions on a checklist overseen by the U.S. Green Building Council, a building-industry group that encourages sustainable construction. Hermitage Elementary earned 27 points. Last year, Old Domin-

ion University's Engineering & Computational Sciences Building was the first area structure to be LEED certified.

Fifth-grader Marcel Hoke, 10, said the new school is different.

"They have more trees and more space," he said. "It's a better place. It gives you more oxygen."

In the computer lab, cabinets are made of strawboard, a substitute for particleboard, made from straw left after wheat is harvested. In the library, wood in bookshelves, the checkout desk and doors come from forests where every tree cut is replanted.

Principal Kathleen Starr, who suffers from allergies and asthma, said she has been breathing easier in the new school.

Air quality was considered during construction. The carpets, paints and floor adhesives used to build the school give off low emissions, explained Marshall Everett Jr., a construction inspector with the school division. Sanding and painting also were halted for the last two weeks before the school opened.

Hermitage Elementary earned points for recycling its old bricks and



Hermitage Elementary fulfilled 27 conditions to earn a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification including:

- Use of natural landscaping
- Waterless urinals and energy-saving fixtures
- Use of recycled materials (i.e. cabinets are made of strawboard)

steel, planning a recycling program (set to start in January) and posting informative signs about the building's "green" features around the school.

Third-grade teacher Maria Ash has been taking advantage of the bike racks, two wavy metal tubes painted blue. At the former Hermitage Elementary, "I chained the bike to a drain spout or took it into the classroom." The new building, constructed on the site of the former school, also includes showers for the staff.

Project manager Tim Cole pushed the division to build the school with environmental effects in mind, said Anthony L. Arnold, the division's facilities planning and construction director. Cole, a former private-sector architect, is a Navy SEAL who was deployed early this

year. Arnold said Virginia Beach will incorporate some of the same techniques in future construction.

Moseley Architects of Virginia Beach designed the school. John Dunn, who does environmental research and planning for the firm, said the environmentally friendly features were added at little cost to taxpayers. Less than 1 percent of the \$11.1 million project was dedicated to making the building more "green" he said. And over the life of the building, the changes are likely to save at least 20 percent on energy costs, Dunn said.

Ash said the building provides a good lesson for her students. "It's the right thing, not just for this school, but for anybody living on Earth."

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