

# Buffalo Law Journal

## The Eco-friendly Firm

*Law Firms Put a Green Foot Forward*

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Though "going green" was once seen as a niche concept reserved for a small segment of the business population, area law firms are seeing the value in adopting green policies.

One Amherst firm has taken green to the extreme, constructing an 80,000-square-foot new building that, when completed in December, will be LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certified. HoganWillig PLLC is constructing the facility across from its current location on John James Audubon Parkway in Amherst, under the direction of Iskalo Development Corp. President and CEO Paul Iskalo.

"When we started working with HoganWillig, the desire was for us to research and find out what productivity enhancing features we could incorporate into the building," Iskalo said. Highlighting those features: an under-floor heating and cooling system that, in addition to producing healthier air to breathe, is green.

"By introducing the air under the floor and through natural convection, it allows the air to rise up and then be exhausted at the ceiling," he explained. "This requires less energy to heat and cool the space because we aren't forcing air in."

The building is also being fitted with

low-flow fixtures that are expected to be 22 percent more efficient than those commonly installed in office buildings. Thanks to a design that will allow every person working in the building to have a view of the outside, natural lighting will reduce energy waste as well.

"We are using ambient light sensors in the lighting so when you have a nice bright day outside, the lighting in the building is dimmed so you are using less energy and relying more on the natural light," Iskalo said.

The HoganWillig building is reaping green benefits before it is even occupied, with a construction plan that has reduced landfill waste by recycling construction materials and reducing environmental impacts by using a minimum of 20 percent of construction materials from regional sources.

HoganWillig is far from alone in its efforts to reduce its proverbial carbon footprint.

Harter Secrest & Emery LLP launched a committee tasked with developing ways the firm could be more environmentally conscious in its four offices.

"Unlike most committees, these folks actually did something," joked John Horn, partner-in-charge of the Rochester-based firm's Buffalo office.

"We immediately started looking at all areas of our operation and identified where we could really make some meaningful changes," he said. "Beyond the more obvious choices, including reducing copies and shifting to electronic memos in-office, the (Green) Committee initiated a switch to paper containing 30 percent recycled material, switched out the lighting in the offices to compact fluorescent bulbs and made changes to the break rooms, replacing plastic forks and knives and Styrofoam cups with metal cutlery and mugs."

Add to that a battery-recycling program and using filtered water instead of bottled water at meetings. Horn says he is excited about the changes at Harter Secrest.

A few years ago, many businesses cited the cost of switching to a green office as a prohibitive factor. Horn says his firm saw the opposite effect.

"The long-term, big-picture costs of not recycling far exceed whatever incremental increase might attend a particular initiative," he said. "With the exception of the use of the 30 percent recycled paper, all of the measures we have undertaken actually save the firm money. It is, in the very truest sense, a win-win scenario."

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Iskalo said despite the use of more-costly fixtures and heating systems for the HoganWillig project, he too sees green options as long-term money savers.

"There are certain things that are an added cost, such as the under-floor HVAC system and the ambient light sensors," he said. "But ultimately, what the studies have indicated is that the productivity-enhancing features more than offset the costs."

Rather than being left green with envy, legal support companies have also gotten into the eco-conscious game. Rob Hooker, general manager for the Pittsburgh, Buffalo and Rochester markets at Ikon Office Solutions, says his company has long seen green initiatives as a no-brainer.

"Given the nature of what we do (scanning, copying and electronic storage of images and data), there is a lot of waste, and probably five or six years ago we began a mandatory recycling program,"

Hooker said. "We encourage our clients to scan instead of copy to save paper, and we have encouraged our clients for years that instead of having all of this paper shipped in, we can have it scanned wherever your client is at and have a disk mailed out, saving shipping costs, not to mention the trucks, airplanes and fuel it takes to ship."

Taking a practice-what-they-preach approach, Hooker said Ikon, which has 44 offices nationwide, utilizes refurbished equipment, recycles its machinery and has greatly reduced its own paper usage. It is a practice that he hopes to see Ikon's clients continuing to embrace.

"We haven't gotten much resistance when we talk to firms about this," he said. "I think it is more about increasing the awareness with our clients to promote scanning documents, (thus) reducing copying and printing expenses and saving them money."

A Firm Commitment

Harter Secrest & Emery LLP organized a Green Committee to discuss and implement ways the company could effectively embrace eco-friendly initiatives. Some key changes the firm made at all of its offices:

- Changing the lighting to compact fluorescent bulbs;
- Using filtered water instead of bottled, eliminating use of plastic bottles;
- Implementing a program to recycle batteries;
- Placing recycling baskets at each desk to encourage paper recycling;
- Replacing plastic forks and knives and Styrofoam cups in the break room with metal cutlery and mugs;
- Changing to paper made from 30 percent recycled material; and
- Reducing printing by encouraging e-mail for inter-office memos and scanning of documents to cut back on copies.