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GREEN BUILDING & DESIGN

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## SONGDO CITY

Korea's Green Gateway

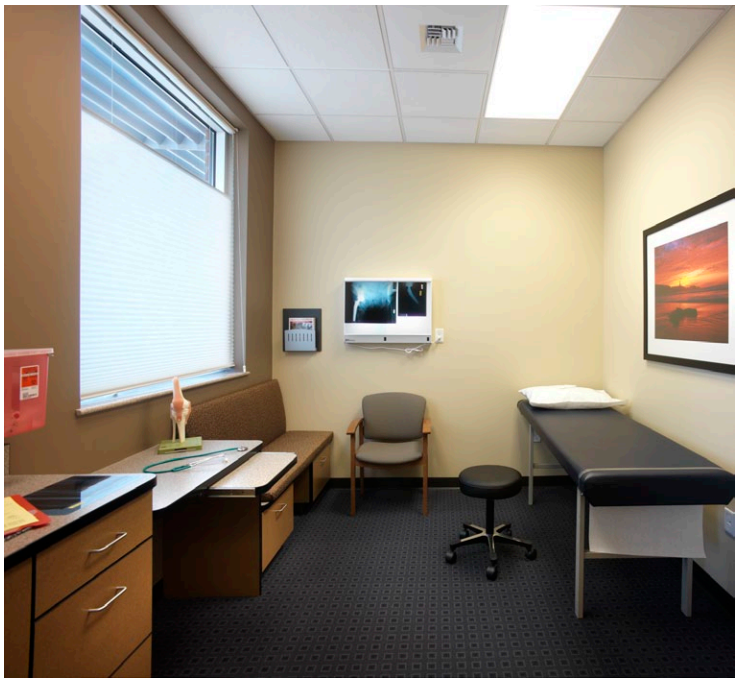
# all-natural approach

Despite obvious parallels between the health of people and that of the planet, The Neenan Company's health-center designs have won awards for their approach to the environment and wellness

*by Susan Johnston*

TRADITIONALLY, A HOSPITAL IS A STERILE, SOMETIMES scary, environment where patients undergo treatment for illnesses or injuries. The Neenan Company, a Colorado-based design-build company, however, has a different approach to designing and building healthcare spaces. Annie Lilyblade, a healthcare/medical planner who has worked at Neenan for the past eight years, says, "We want to transform these buildings into a wellness environment."

The Neenan Company's work on The Slocum Center for Orthopedics and Sports Medicine in Eugene, Oregon, is one example of its wellness-based philosophy. As the first LEED Gold-certified orthopedic center in the country, the Slocum Center has garnered awards for its sustainability, including its decreased energy usage and healthful work environment.

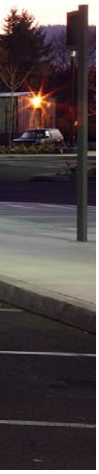


"If you have a focus around sustainability, you can make [healthcare spaces] more of a healing and wellness environment."

—Annie Lilyblade, Healthcare/Medical Planner

As Lilyblade explains, "If you have a focus around sustainability, you can make [healthcare spaces] more of a healing and wellness environment. One of the big ones is the connection to the environment, bringing in a lot more daylighting and having this connection to the outdoors. It's important to have local materials that are more natural, less synthetic, because it tends to create a more welcoming or inviting space. It's more homelike and has a comforting feel."

In addition to medical buildings, the Neenan Company also brings a wellness-based approach to designing and building schools. "Indoor-air quality is a big deal for us," Lilyblade notes. "We're dealing with populations that really need a clean environment."



Recent educational design-build projects include additions for the Valley RE-1 School District in Iliff and Sterling, Colorado, which won a Colorado Construction Top Project in 2007. The company also saved the Weld Central School District thousands of dollars in energy and maintenance costs through its designs for a new 1,100-student high school in Keenesburg, Colorado.

The Neenan Company is an integrated design-build company, so architects, planners, consultants, project managers, and field superintendents work under one umbrella company. As Lilyblade puts it, "The focus is on relationships to ensure a quality project and to eliminate waste in both the design and the construction process." The company uses the term "archistruction" to describe this collaborative approach. An open office configuration with no private offices in its main location maximizes daylight and encourages communication.

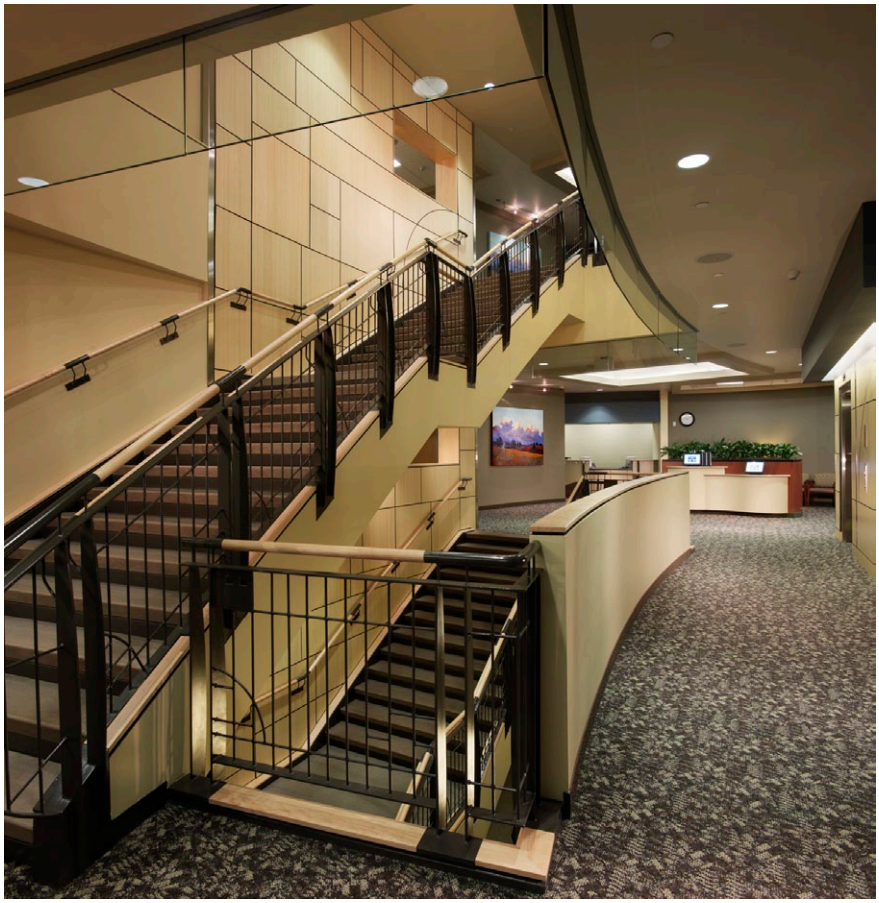
Testing fixtures and other items in its own offices ensures that the company makes sound product recommendations. "We pilot different strategies within our own office, so we can pass that information onto clients," Lilyblade says.

OPPOSITE: The Slocum Center at twilight. ABOVE: The Slocum Center's exam rooms feature daylighting and natural materials to provide a more comforting experience. Photos: Ed Lacasse Photography.

"We've tried out everything from waterless urinals to a green roof on our own building. We share with them more physical and personal experience rather than just factual data."

Colorado—and specifically Fort Collins—values the outdoors, and that attitude towards the environment has aided the company's internal efforts. "We're located on a bike trail, which encourages employees to get out," Lilyblade adds. "Because the City of Fort Collins has done so many great things in encouraging resources, it's really become a city effort and increased the efforts that we've been able to do. We're in a nice environment, so we're able to make the correlation [between our efforts and their impact on the environment]."

Although many of the Neenan Company's employees are invested in environmental conservation, Lilyblade says that changing behaviors is still a challenge. As she explains, "One of the first strategies was to go through a massive recycling program. We had to figure out how to change people's behaviors, and what we ended up doing was taking everybody's trash cans away for a week and making recycling bins available."



Going beyond normal, at-will recycling, the Neenan Company instituted an intense policy where 84 percent of the office waste is recycled. In that same period, the company also reduced its paper use by 86 percent through the use of software that minimizes printing and enables printing in a wiser fashion.

Neenan hires local subcontractors and uses carpools when travel is necessary. Video conferencing and web technologies have helped reduce the firm's carbon footprint so they can meet with clients virtually. Going forward, the company is exploring the use of solar panels, hydro-powered faucets, green roofs in collaboration with a local greenhouse, and insulated glass or fiberglass windows in their offices.

Lilyblade foresees the sustainable-building movement picking up steam in the years to come. "For us, it's been a snowball effort," she says. "It seems that once we can accomplish one thing, the next technology or the next big idea is right around the corner. It's been exciting for us, and we see more people getting excited about it as well, as they realize some changes are easy to make." gb&d