

Green community solutions are happening

By Drs. Robert & Sonia Vogl
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Sometimes, people in their daily lives take actions that deserve praise and recognition.

For years, Kerry Knodle, long-time executive director of YouthBuild Rockford, has been helping young adult high school dropouts learn usable skills to obtain jobs in the construction industry. More than 430 have graduated and are self-supporting, pursuing fulfilling careers. Many area residents are unaware of his quiet, low-key program.

But recently, big changes have been taking place. The nonprofit organization, a program of Comprehensive Community Solutions (CCS), has been funded by the U.S. Department of Labor to develop "green" programs fitting with the growing green movement. The program "was designed to start youth on a career path in the green technology and sustainable agriculture industry sector." YouthBuild's three funded programs are in Deconstruction, Weatherization/Energy Auditing, and Brownfield remediation. YouthBuild graduates are receiving training to develop new green jobs skills.

One part of the new green jobs training program, deconstruction, is like recycling. Actually, it's re-using building materials that would have been thrown away. Rather than demolish a no longer wanted building, deconstructors carefully take it apart and save the materials for future use. In this case, CCS workers (graduates of the YouthBuild program) are taking apart buildings in an old lumber yard. Materials will be available for purchase in their reuse center.

Lumber could be used for special effects or decorative purposes in a single room or could be used to build an entire house as Prairie Preservation President Keith Blackmore did with lumber from an old grain mill.

CCS is also about to start an urban agriculture program. Constructing a green roof on the Rockford CCS headquarters will be one of the first projects.

Within the next few weeks, CCS will also be involved with building the first Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified single-family homes in the Rockford area. LEED certification considers "sustainability of building materials and resources, site selection and management, and water and energy efficiency, among other criteria."

Two affordable, approximately 1,700-square-foot homes with five bedrooms and two baths will be built less than a mile north of downtown Rockford at the intersection of Rockton Avenue and Whitman Street. Mayor Larry Morrissey (I) endorses the project, stating: "These homes reflect Rockford's focus on energy efficiencies and green technology. Their addition to the neighborhood will provide the type of housing solution that will act as a model for future growth in our housing market."

Following the construction of LEED-certified homes, CCS and Kestrel Real Estate Holdings, LLC, plan to build the city's first zero net-energy homes. Not only will they meet LEED's platinum rating standard, their electricity will be provided by photovoltaic (solar electric) systems and their heating and cooling by geothermal systems, which will produce as much energy as the homes use over a year's time.

We applaud Kerry Knodle, who states that, "We are looking forward to moving Rockford and Winnebago County into the new 'green economy,' and particularly to bring these training programs to underserved populations."

Drs. Robert and Sonia Vogl are founders and officers of the Illinois Renewable Energy Association (IREA) and coordinate the annual Renewable Energy and Sustainable Lifestyle Fair. The Vogls and



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the IREA are members of the Environmental Hall of Fame. Dr. Robert Vogl is vice president of Freedom Field, and Dr. Sonia Vogl is a member of Freedom Field's Executive Committee. The Vogls consult on energy efficiency, renewable energy and green building. They have 3.2 kW of PV and a 1 kW wind generator at their home. Forty acres of their 180-acre home farm are in ecological restorations. They are active in preserving natural areas and are retired professors from Northern Illinois University. E-mail sonia@essex1.com.

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