

Engaging spaces

Miron's new expansion showcases energy efficiency By Nikki Kallio

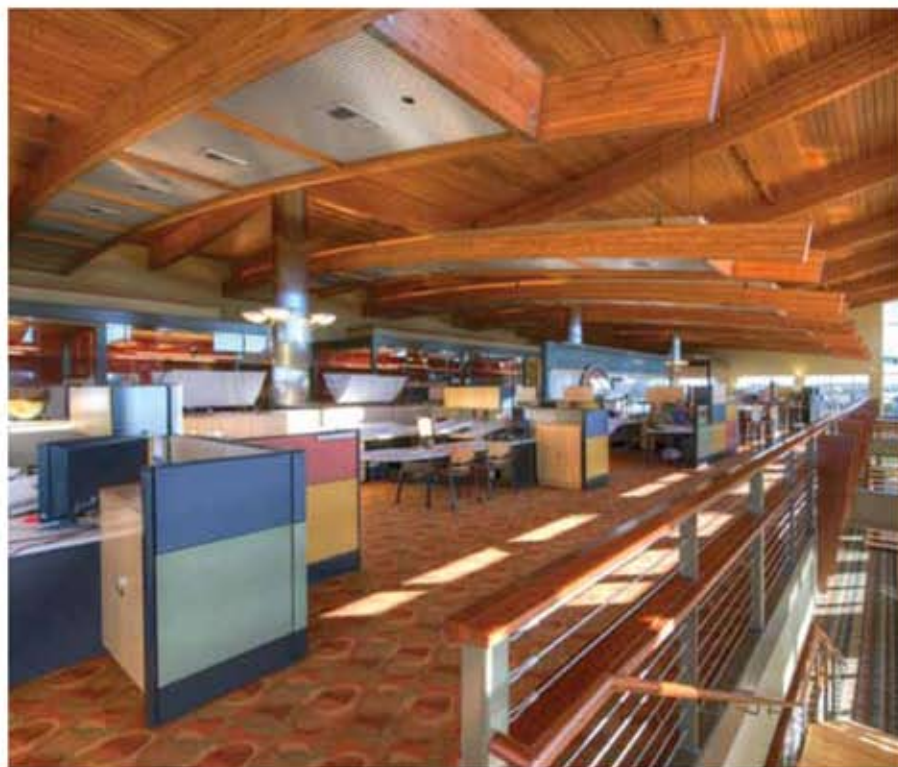
When the price of gas hit \$4 a gallon last year, it was hard to imagine an upside. But it did make people think about energy consumption a little differently, and some businesses began to look a little more closely at ways to reduce energy costs.

"I can't think of a project that we're involved in right now where people don't want to at least talk about or understand how they can be good stewards of the environment or as sustainable as they can, or look at the efficiencies of their systems," says Craig Uhlenbrauck, vice president of marketing for Miron Construction. "It's such a huge part of our business now."

It's so huge that Miron's new \$10 million expansion to its corporate offices in Neenah was built with sustainability as a focus. The company's aim is to not only serve as an example of sustainable construction, but to also simplify the construction process for its clients and to create a more collaborative environment between departments.

The project brings Miron's corporate offices from 61,000- to 112,000-square-feet, expanding a space that's just seven years old. Miron had its second-best year in 2008 with \$620 million in revenue, about \$220 million of which consisted of LEED projects, says Theresa Lehman, director of sustainable services.

LEED, or Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, is a certification system for excellence in



Natural light floods into the workspaces throughout the newly expanded Miron Construction headquarters in the town of Neenah. The exterior windows are designed to allow more daylight to the building; sensors automatically turn off lights inside when there's enough light.

green building. In early November, Miron was compiling documentation to submit for its own LEED certification, Lehman said.

The newly-expanded building gives Miron an opportunity to explain to clients how sustainability can benefit their companies – by increasing employee wellness, minimizing environmental impact and providing a savings on energy.

"When people say they want to be sustainable or want to be green, I think they say it because they've heard of

it – they don't necessarily know what that means, or the degree of greenness, or the shade of green you can actually go," she says.

To help, Miron installed U.S. Green Building Council symbols throughout its building to demonstrate ways sustainability can be integrated into the building process. For example, one symbol shows where part of the original building was incorporated into the expansion, reducing waste. Another indicates that reclaimed wood, salvaged from shipwrecks from



Miron Construction's landscaping is designed to help reduce heat on the exterior of the building. Special parking spaces are reserved for employees who carpool or drive efficient vehicles.

the bottom of Lake Superior, was used to make the floor.

The building also is an educational tool on the construction process itself, Uhlenbrauck says. Work stations around the building aid planning. Features such as a wall-sized cross-section of the Miron building in the estimating department show categories of construction expenses such as metals or electrical.

The airy, open concept of the office space is meant to increase transparency between staff, partners and clients, Lehman explains. All of the private offices are walled in glass, which at first was a little too transparent (Lehman walked into one and got a black eye) so Miron added nature-themed etchings such as waves and sea turtles to improve visibility. Cubicle walls were lowered and the fabric recycled and replaced with low-emitting materials to cut VOCs (volatile organic compounds) in the air. Other new materials, including carpet and paint, are also low-emitting. "It doesn't smell like a new building," Lehman points out.

Other features include:

- » A parking lot with landscaping to help reduce heat on the exterior of the building and special parking

spaces reserved for employees who carpool or drive efficient vehicles. (The stripes are painted blue. Why? It's the Miron color, and the traditional yellow or white was not required, explains Miron's Steve Tyink.)

- » The exterior windows are designed to allow more daylight to the building so sensors automatically turn off lights inside when there's enough light, and that saves energy and money, says Chad Pingel, sustainable services manager.

- » A geothermal heat pump system heats and cools the office. Such systems use 25 percent to 50 percent less electricity than conventional heating or cooling systems. High-quality air filters help increase productivity and health, Lehman says.

- » A training center, named for (Milwaukee) architect Edward W. Wenzler, who died unexpectedly just as construction began. The rooms are available to community organizations, and one room has a gym floor that can double as a yoga or aerobics room. The expansion also added a 24-hour wellness center.

Clients who have toured the new space describe it as "outstanding" and "fabulous."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MIRON CONSTRUCTION

After touring the building, Mark Skogen, president and CEO of Skogen Festival Foods, says he thought the amount of daylight in the office made it a pleasant work environment. "Even the cube areas of the building seem very spacious and would be as good as having one's own private office," he says.

Bill Breider, president and CEO of YMCA of the Fox Cities, says he liked how the company's mission and core values were apparent and displayed prominently, as well as "the way that they embraced their history and past and integrated it with their vision for the future." ❶