

Devon: LEEDing the way to the future

By Cindy Allen

Two years ago, the skyline of Oklahoma City began to change dramatically as the city's newest and tallest building rose from a four-block vacant brownfield site that was previously home to a parking garage. Construction on the 50-story Devon Energy Center began in 2009 and topped out in September 2011 with fanfare and excitement about how this brand new office tower would contribute to the renaissance of downtown Oklahoma City.



A vision for transforming the area into a new office tower started in 2002 when Devon Energy's executive chairman Larry Nichols saw the need to build a new home for his growing company. Devon had located in Oklahoma City's Mid-America Tower in 1981, yet the company's phenomenal growth outpaced the space in the one building, and employees began to move into five other buildings. Nichols knew the time had come to find a new home where all the company's Oklahoma City Devon workforce could be united under one roof.

"We wanted a comfortable environment where employees could truly enjoy coming to work every day and be proud of where they work," Nichols said. He also wanted the building to be a significant contribution to the community fabric and people of Oklahoma City.

Since mid-March of this year, groups of employees have been moving into the new Devon Energy Center at 333 W. Sheridan, and all employees will be in the new building by the end of summer.

The completion of the city's most remarkable downtown skyscraper now defines the central business district, and it also represents how a brownfield site can be transformed into a major economic development catalyst.

As part of the project, Devon worked closely with the city of Oklahoma City to initiate a \$115 million Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district to transform downtown Oklahoma City's core 180 degrees. Known as Project 180, this is a complete redesign of the city infrastructure to include pedestrian friendly streets, sidewalks, parks and plazas while utilizing public art, landscaping and decorative street lighting.

Not only has the development boasted social, economic and environmental accountability, the development is also a symbol of sustainability. The company emphasized energy efficiency in the design and construction, taking measures to allow the building to earn Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification in the design and construction, targeting the gold level.

Evaluations are based on metrics such as energy savings, water emissions, CO2 emissions reduction, improved indoor environmental quality and stewardship of resources with sensitivity to their impacts.

"As Oklahoma's largest company, we recognize the leadership role we play in Oklahoma City," said Klay Kimker, Devon vice president of administration. "By building an office tower that is certified under LEED, we can establish a positive standard within our community."

Filling a gaping hole

The area chosen for the new construction had a history as a transportation center. The site once housed the historic Terminal Building, the hub of the early-day Oklahoma City trolley system.



An urban renewal project of the 1970s created a grand plan to develop office, hotel and retail space around a central garden area. While the Myriad Gardens project was built, other parts of the urban renewal project dream faded with the economic times, and the area north of the gardens didn't develop as originally planned. It was an empty space in the city's core central district. A large parking structure was all that remained of the original plan.

Not much happened until Devon stirred the imagination of Oklahoma City with its announced construction of a new tower and conference center, including public space, such as a restaurant and garden area.

As part of Devon's pre-acquisition work, the OKC Brownfields Program performed an environmental assessment of the property. Ultimately, Devon discovered petroleum underground storage tanks and impacted soils and groundwater that required

remediation under Oklahoma Corporation Commission regulations. Like much of the former transportation hub, the impacted soils were reused. The local landfill was able to use the soils to cover the daily waste disposed at the landfill.

City, company and state officials worked together cooperatively, and the remediation proceeded smoothly, was completed on time and within budget, setting the stage for the skyline transformation of Oklahoma City to begin.

From “brown” to “gold”

When the sun is rising or setting, the three-sided glass tower glows with hues of bronze, green, blue and gold. It is the goal of the Devon team that the building literally go from “brown to gold,” so-to-speak, when the LEED certification is complete.

The LEED Green Building Rating system is a set of criteria established by the U.S. Green Building Council to encourage and accelerate global adoption of sustainable green building practices. In keeping with Devon’s core values, gaining LEED certification became one of the company’s objectives. The company has complied with criteria for the gold rating. The building’s certification and designation will be complete in late 2012. To be considered a “green building,” every aspect of the design and construction had to meet sustainability standards, from recycling construction waste to energy efficiency in the completed product.

Crews diverted more than 68,000 tons of waste and concrete from the landfill. The building was built with 27 percent recycled materials, and 65 percent of the wood on the project was harvested from certified forests that promote sustainable forestry.

The building is also designed to the advanced standards of environmental technology. The building includes efficient use of natural light. Floor-to-ceiling vision glass with external and interior sun-shading devices enhance day lighting for interior spaces and provide great views.

The landscaping and irrigation design reduces potable water consumption by more than 50 percent by using native plantings and water efficient irrigation equipment. State-of-the-art heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems create a cleaner, healthier environment with reduced CO2 emissions.

The calculated energy-cost savings is estimated at more than 17 percent. Yet, there is also a benefit to employees, Kimker said.

“We work hard to recruit the best and brightest people in order to accomplish our objectives as an energy company,” he said. “We owe it to them to provide the best work environment possible.”

As employees continue to move into their new space, and the final construction pieces are put in place, the new Devon Energy Center is already making wide-ranging urban contributions. The new center serves as a cornerstone of the city’s downtown redevelopment project, linking business, entertainment and recreation districts together for Oklahoma City residents and visitors to enjoy for many years to come.