

THE KANSAS CITY STAR.

Expansion proves better than Gold

Small KC company Posty Cards pushes its remodel to get top environmental rating.

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THE KANSAS CITY STAR

Earth Day will be a bit greener Sunday, courtesy of a small Kansas City greeting card company that went for the Platinum on its recent \$6.4 million expansion.

That's the top environmental grade from the U.S. Green Building Council, and Posty Cards' new digs are one of only seven industrial projects nationwide to earn it.

You don't even have to know about the 198 solar panels or the big silo in the landscaped courtyard that can store 8,300 gallons of rainwater runoff to enjoy what sets the Posty Cards' complex apart from the surrounding industrial district.

Just a couple of blocks east of the 18th and Vine Jazz District, dreary gravel lots and sterile architecture are the norm. But a visitor entering Posty Cards is welcomed by a ramp flanked by native blue grama grass, Little Henry Sweetspire and Coreopsis.

Inside, the lobby is illuminated by natural light from the entrance and an interior courtyard.

The rich-looking floor reflecting the glow is polished concrete, jokingly referred to as "poor man's terazzo" by Erick Jessee, Posty Card's president.

And in case the faint aroma of soy ink doesn't clue you to the nature of the business, several old printing presses dating from the 1890s and early 1900s are on display.

Jessee is the third generation of the family to run the firm since it was established in 1948 by Carl "Posty"



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Erick Jessee is president of Posty Cards, a small, family-owned greeting card company that emphasized energy savings in the project that doubled the size of its manufacturing plant.

Postlethwaite, an artist and businessman. The 40-employee company designs, manufactures and sells customized products including greeting cards and calendars for businesses around the country.

When Posty Cards decided three years ago it had outgrown the building at 1600 Olive St. where it's been since 1988, Jessee said he wanted to make a statement that reinforced the environmentally friendly paper products it makes with recycled and renewable materials.

He decided to pursue Gold certification for the 25,000-square-foot expansion project from the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, or LEED, program overseen by the Green Building Council.

"When you look at a small business, if you have an opportunity to

build it's typically once in a generation," he said. "We felt compelled that whatever investment we made, we did it right.

"By going for LEED Gold, we felt it would be a leading edge building, and we exceeded our expectations."

By working closely with its project designers, a team that included MSM Architects, Turner Construction and PKMR Engineers, the addition was planned from the start with LEED Gold certification in mind.

But when the LEED score was totaled, the designers found they were 15 points over the Gold certification and just five shy of reaching Platinum.

"At that point we said here's an opportunity to go one more step, we were so close," said Christopher Mitchell, the architect at MSM who

PLATINUM: Posty Cards' expansion achieves top LEED certification

Posty Cards decided to add a little more sunshine to the project.

The design increased the number of solar panels to boost the amount of power generated from 9 percent to 11 percent of the company's energy use. That, along with a little additional record-keeping measure, pushed the company over the top.

Despite doubling the size of its facility, the company will increase its energy use by only 5 percent. With those savings, Mitchell estimated Posty Cards would cover the cost of the technology used to earn LEED Platinum in 12 to 15 years. Those features include the solar panels and a special heating and cooling system.

As for how much more it cost overall to design the building to such high environmental standards, the architect was at a loss.

"It's a difficult question to answer because of how integrated the approach was from the beginning," Mitchell said. "We never took the time to cost it out."

Posty Cards has not only become one of a handful of industrial projects nationwide to earn Platinum LEED status, it's the first project to achieve that level of certification on the Missouri side of the metro and only the second in the area. The Johnson County Youth and Family Services Center in Olathe also recently received Platinum LEED status.

"That's a really big deal," said Jenny Bloomfield-Sciara, chairwoman of the Central Plains Chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council.

"Posty Cards is a fairly small company, and for a small company to want to do that is really impressive."

By comparison, some of the other industrial ventures to earn Platinum are Volkswagen Chattanooga in Tennessee; ConAgra Foods in Delhi, La.; and The Other World Computing in Woodstock, Ill.

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Bloomfield-Sciara added it was also more challenging for an industrial facility to meet LEED goals than an office project.

"In an industrial building, it's a completely different target," she said. "Things like daylight and views are difficult to achieve."

And that's what really distinguishes the Posty Cards expansion project. Almost every corner of the facility, which now totals 45,000 square feet, is reached by natural light.

"The big idea was the courtyard," Mitchell said. "It was the ordering principal of everything that brought light into the building."

The courtyard can be viewed all over the complex through large windows. Its floor is a sand-like material that absorbs rainwater and serves as a landscaped patio for employees. It's also where the 18-foot-tall rain barrel is. The runoff water it collects from the roof is used to irrigate the plants and flush the toilets.

Jessee also said the courtyard visually connected the employees in the expanded facility, linking workers in the printing plant with their office counterparts.

"I love knowing that our employees are able to look out the window and see trees from the production line," he said.

Other features include a charging station in the parking lot for electric cars ("I hope to get one soon," Jessee said), and a heating and cooling system that adjusts itself depending on the temperature needs of each room.

Lance Jessee, the chairman of the company board and Erick's father, credits his son with pushing hard for

designing a building with so many environmental goodies.

It also gives the senior Jessee a chance to practice his hobby. He is vice president of the local chapter of the Missouri Native Plant Society.

"It's a wonderful facility," he said. "What I enjoy most are the native plants. I'm an enthusiast, and it's like having a garden at work."

The project would not have worked financially without the help of tax incentives and other support, including a solar rebate from Kansas City Power & Light. Posty Cards obtained a 10-year local property tax abatement and \$2 million from the federal New Market Tax Credit program.

"We're a small business with a big idea," Jessee said. "We weren't sure we would have been able to accomplish it, but a lot of players in the city, state and federal government side got behind us and helped us get the project off the ground."

He also saluted U.S. Bank and its community development corporation for buying the tax credits and providing other financing for the project.

"Their belief in us was key," Jessee said.

Bloomfield-Sciara said Posty Cards is a great example of the environmentally-friendly approach the U.S. Green Building Council is encouraging.

"Earth Day is a great day, but every day is Earth Day," she said, and that's what the Green Building Council "is trying to promote."

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