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Omega's landmark achievement in Green Building



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The wood rainscreen acts much like the fly of a tent, shedding most water but remaining open to air movement so the building can "breathe". There is an impermeable layer behind it. More than 300 people gathered in Rhinebeck, New York Thursday for the grand opening of the award-winning Omega Center for Sustainable Living (OCSL), which is slated to be the first certified "Living Building" in America. The OCSL, a state-of-the-art water reclamation facility and environmental education center, will clean Omega Institute's wastewater, and provide sustainability education for students, professionals, policymakers, developers, and the 23,000 visitors who attend Omega's programs every year.

"Omega should be commended for their visionary approach to creating what is slated to be the nation's first certified "Living Building" in the Hudson Valley," said Congressman Scott Murphy (NY-20). "The OCSL's ground-breaking technology signals Upstate New York's leadership in both environmental sustainability, and clean-energy technology."

"The OCSL is a dynamic, living and breathing demonstration of how interconnected we all are with the world around us," said Skip Backus, chief executive officer at Omega. "Our goal is to help people reexamine how they relate to the world by

showing them what's possible in terms of environmental sustainability and green energy. Omega is very proud to be at the forefront of this movement."

The grand opening celebration included keynote remarks from Omega's leadership and notable speakers, including Majora Carter, founder of Sustainable South Bronx and president of The Majora Carter Group; Dr. John Todd, founder of John Todd Ecological Design and designer of the Eco-Machine™, a central component of the OCSL; and Tara Sullivan, executive director of the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial Commission.

"Today Omega has established an historic contribution in sustainability and green energy, which they've brought to the region and to the world," said Tara Sullivan, who presented Omega with a New York State Letter of Commendation from Governor Paterson, designating the OCSL a Quadricentennial Legacy Project, and commemorating the historic day.

"Sustainability means knowing that we should travel this world lightly, and that it isn't ours to simply use or abuse," said Majora Carter. "Today, as we think about developing a green economy, we can see the OCSL as an example of what's possible when each of us takes the initiative and does what we can."

The project, five years in the making, is on target to achieve LEED® Platinum certification, and has been widely recognized as a pioneer in the Living Building Challenge™. The Living Building Challenge requires a building be informed by its eco-region's characteristics; generate all of its own energy with renewable resources; capture and treat all of its water; and operate efficiently, and for maximum beauty.

The OCSL was designed by Kansas City based BNIM Architects, renowned for sustainable design. The OCSL supplies all of its own energy needs and its operation is carbon neutral. The self-sustaining building is heated and cooled using geothermal systems, and utilizes photovoltaic power. It will serve as the heart of Omega's ongoing environmental initiatives and includes a greenhouse, an Eco-Machine, constructed wetlands, and a classroom that will be open year-round to the public.

The core of the center is a 4,500-square-foot greenhouse containing a water filtration system called the Eco-Machine designed by John Tood Ecological Design. This living system uses plants, bacteria, algae, snails, and fungi to recycle Omega's wastewater (approximately 5 million gallons per year) into clean water that is used to restore the aquifer.

"The OCSL is truly a world in miniature – it is rewriting the rules for sustainability," said John Todd, ecological designer and developer of the Eco Machine. "By working to meet the Living Building Challenge, the OCSL pushed the design envelope to allow this building to live in the sacred ecology that connects each of us to one another."

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