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SERF's up as option to LEED

In the 11 years that the LEED, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, program has been around, the idea of giving a nod to buildings for energy efficiency has become well known.

Now that the **U.S. Green Building Council** has everyone thinking in terms of "green," there have even been cases of buildings that want to be built to "LEED specifications," rather than actually being certified by the group's criteria.

Why? The process of becoming LEED-certified can take years in some cases, and requires the costly hiring of architects and engineers to fill out the paperwork — at least, that's how Joe Maguire sees it.

"I think a void has been created in the industry," he said. "In many cases, there's a lack of accessibility to the certification. It's expensive and it's time-consuming."

So Maguire has set out to create his own certification, SERF, for **Society of Environmentally Responsible Facilities**, and has started with buildings in the Midwest and plans to work its way across the country.

Maguire launched the program, based in East Lansing, in October at an event in Chicago. So far, the program has certified 32 buildings — with 14 in the pipeline.

But that pipeline, he said, will be clear much faster than LEED's.

"Our timeline is four to six weeks," he said. "They take two years. We're approaching this from the perspective of the property owner and investor. How can the process be more efficient, more accessible?"

Among the differences, he said, is that the application can be filled out by the architect who designed the building rather than LEED's requirement of hiring another architect to fill out the paperwork. A streamlined application process cuts down on the time it takes consultants — paid by the hour — to complete the work.

"This is purely a reaction to what we're hearing in the field," he said.

The Green Building Council does not view SERF as competition, but rather another route to promote the overall idea of green building.

"We look at other certification systems and green building-based organizations as collaborators, not competitors," said Jennifer Easton, a communications associate with USGBC. "We can't do this job alone."

Maguire agrees.

"I have great respect for the USGBC and LEED," he said. "They've created this model and we're making it more accessible."

But SERF has a long way to go in order to be in the same league; LEED has 9,171 buildings certified.

"I think we've hit a nerve," Maguire said. "Things are going much more rapidly than we anticipated."