

Ecology, Economy, EcoPlex

LEED® Gold Certified Building Features Raised Access Floors in One of Florida County's First 'Green' Multi-tenant Office Building

By **Steve Alwine**, Tate Access Floors

When real estate service provider Navarro Lowrey, Inc. embarked on a new, \$28 million Class "A" office building in Centrepark West, a 28-acre mixed-use corporate park in West Palm Beach, Fla., Managing Partner Frank Navarro announced a new approach to the project.

"I wanted to continue to do all the things we had done well in past projects, but layer in a sustainability piece to create a healthier workspace within a highly energy-efficient building; a structure that would significantly reduce the negative impact of the building and its operations upon the environment."

The result is EcoPlex, a 100,000-square-foot, four-story office building that was awarded LEED® Gold certification through the U.S. Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating system. One of the first multi-tenant "green" office buildings in Palm Beach County and among the largest to adopt sustainable building practices in Florida, the building demonstrates a commitment to environmentally sound building practices and to the health, comfort and security of its occupants.

Navarro Lowrey executed its plan for EcoPlex mindful of the tenants that would occupy the new space. "We approached efficiency and sustainability in a way we felt potential tenants would value and appreciate," said Navarro. "Our biggest value creation decision was to use a Tate® raised access floor system and Haworth demountable partitions throughout the building. This combination creates value in a number of important ways.

"First, we delivered the space more quickly than we could have with traditional construction. More importantly, we can reconfigure the space throughout the term of the lease, providing flexibility to tenants as space needs change."

The building's 25,000-square-foot floor plates are column-free. The access floor, raised 16 inches above the slab, accommodates all tenant systems, including cooling and heating, electrical, data and phone systems, maximizing workspace flexibility.

One tenant quickly took advantage of this built-in flexibility. "One month after they moved in, the tenant hired another employee, requiring an additional office," recalled Navarro Lowrey Executive Vice President Rick Abedon. "The raised floor system and demountable walls enabled us to reconfigure their space over a weekend and create a new office."

As this example illustrates, a raised floor system also eliminates the need to lease extra space to cover growth. "In buildings that feature traditional floors, tenants tend to build empty offices for future growth, paying for space they may not occupy for years," said Navarro. "In this building, tenants don't need to do that. The raised floors with movable plug-and-play electric, data and ventilation boxes, enable us to internalize growth. A space that holds 10 people today can be reconfigured to hold as many as 20 or 25 tomorrow."

"In addition to flexibility, we can also market healthier air and energy savings associated with the raised floor system," said Abedon. "We tell prospective tenants how the underfloor air distribution (UFAD) system works – air is delivered at occupant level, conditioning just the occupied zone, and relies on natural convection, not fan power (and the associated energy costs), to rise to air vents at ceiling level, where the air leaves the space. Air can be delivered at warmer temperatures (in our case 62 or 64 degrees rather than 55 degrees) than an overhead ventilation system, further reducing energy costs. "And because air is delivered at occupant level and doesn't mix with air in the rest of the space, the raised floor system contributes to improved indoor air quality (IAQ). "

"Features like the raised floor system appeal to us as design engineers," said Brad Roeth, operations manager for EcoPlex tenant Stanley Consultants, Inc., a worldwide provider of engineering, environmental and construction services. "It demonstrates Stanley's commitment to sustainability, not only in our designs, but also in our business practices."

Navarro Lowrey supports its EcoPlex tenants with a focused property management and ownership platform. “We employ a highly trained technical staff that can move floor panels and perform the tasks that make the raised floor system so versatile,” said Navarro. “We’re using the floor as an extension of our property management platform to provide the highest service in the market.”

EcoPlex is teeming with other features that attract prospective tenants, beginning with full generator capability for seven days. Protection from Florida’s extreme weather also includes exterior walls consisting of solid concrete, steel-reinforced, tilt-up wall panels and a “large missile,” high-impact, exterior window glazing system.

In addition, a sophisticated rainwater recycling system captures water on the roof and directs it to four large cisterns, where it is stored for flushing toilets. The EcoPlex campus also uses a water retention and treatment pond to supply water that cycles through the building’s cooling tower, saving 5,000 to 10,000 gallons of water a day typically lost to evaporation. In all, the project is expected to save an estimated two million gallons of water annually and be about 80 percent more efficient from a water use perspective than a comparable non-green building.

EcoPlex also features:

- Energy-saving systems offering tenants first-year projected savings of \$.60 to \$.80 per square foot in operating costs
- 10-foot clear ceiling heights and oversized windows that increase natural lighting, reducing energy costs and improving indoor environmental quality
- Highly reflective roof that lowers cooling costs
- Natural water filtration system
- Non-toxic interior finishes for carpet, flooring and furniture
- Recycled materials in 40 percent of the project

The investment in new office space that incorporates these and other sustainable design principles proved so successful that Navarro Lowrey trademarked EcoPlex. “We want EcoPlex to be a label that people identify with our interpretation of sustainability,” Navarro explained.

“We’ll be able to ensure consistency in our product, identifying and branding what we do and how we do it.

“The EcoPlex building is the flagship for the brand. I like to call it ‘an office building with a conscience.’ With EcoPlex, we provide the structure that will enable a business to thrive, but we do so in a responsible way, creating a healthy workplace that introduces conservation into a company’s culture.”

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