

UU Congregation at Rock Tavern: The Greening of a New Spiritual Home

Out of the ashes of the UU Congregation at Rock Tavern (UUCRT) sanctuary that burned to the ground in 2006, a new building rises at 9 Vance Lane in Rock Tavern. Final phases of construction and interior finishes are being completed on what congregants hope will become a beacon of environmental stewardship for future generations. With some variables of the construction schedule, the new sanctuary will open this spring. Currently the congregation meets at St. Anne's Episcopal Church in Washingtonville.

After the building burned, the congregation voted to rebuild. They wanted to incorporate the 7th UU principle of "respect for the interdependent web of all existence for which we are a part." One way to do that was to incorporate as many Leed certified environmentally friendly features into the new building as was financially feasible.

"We have nearly reached the silver standard," said Athena Drewes, chair of the UUCRT building committee.

The congregation hired Leed certified, Alfandre Architecture and a green engineering firm, Fuss & O'Neill. Although the congregation will not pursue Leed certification, through the experienced guidance of these green conscious companies, was able to include an impressive list of environmentally friendly features.

Most notably, the new sanctuary's roofline is "solar panel ready." The congregation has begun a solar panel fund and will work toward incorporating new solar technologies. The design of the building maximizes sunlight and southern exposure, has triple glazed windows, uses many recycled building materials and local woods, the best insulation possible at a R-21 value (standard is R-19) and overlapping joints in the sanctuary vaulted ceiling to reduce heat loss. Energy consumption will be kept to a minimum through a 93% efficiency furnace which will run on LP bottled propane, a clean burning by-product of the oil industry. The building is being built by local contractors and subcontractors.

On Sunday, January 25, the UUCRT voted to pursue Green Sanctuary status from the UUA. The goal is to understand environmental stewardship as not just a set of "building features" but also as a spiritual practice, educational outreach, and community engagement on environmental issues.

"Over the past several years, we have already begun many environmental programs and activities for our congregation. We've had environmental services that focus on farming and food justice for people in poverty. We've engaged in wetland clean up volunteer events that highlight the need to clear consumer trash from our waterways.

"Our children planted a sunflower garden last summer from starts they transplanted in the early spring," said Terri Pahucki, Chair of the Green Sanctuary Committee. "This year, we plan to continue our wetlands work in the stream. This will be a good opportunity for our youth to make connections between clean water and healthy food and farming." For more information about UUCRT, www.uucrt.org.