

River City Building Solutions co-owners Pam Berkebile (left) and Peggy Powers: "We never felt like people in the industry discriminated against us. Everyone gave us a fair shot. It was a great thing to see."



LIVING THE GREEN DREAM

RIVER CITY BUILDING SOLUTIONS THRIVES THROUGH SALES OF ECO-FRIENDLY BUILDING MATERIALS

BY DOUGLAS J. GUTH | PHOTO BY THOMAS SKERNIVITZ

Take a drive through any Ohio college campus or medical corridor and you will come across all manner of new construction. While admiring the architecture, take a moment to think about the building materials used to give function to the form, and exactly what kind of impact those resources may have on the environment.

Welcome to Peggy Powers' world.

The Rocky River native is co-owner of River City Building Solutions, a Cleveland-based supplier of green and sustainable building materials. She and partner Pam Berkebile sell their products to construction companies that are working on university and hospital facilities throughout the state.

River City's projects are LEED Certified, meaning they pass a rating system for the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of green buildings, homes and neighborhoods. Developed by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC), LEED is intended to help building owners and operators be environmentally responsible and use resources efficiently.

That is good news for Powers, as according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, nearly 40 percent of total U.S. power consumption in 2012 was consumed by residential and commercial structures. Heating, ventilation, cooling, and lighting all sponge off resources, more so than even Powers realized when she helped found her business in 2011.

"I had thought it was cars using up the majority of energy," she says. "We saw building material supply as an area to get into to help the environment."

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Her company supplies clients with such eco-friendly products as foam insulation, electrical materials and recycled metals. Among its most recent projects, River City provided a water-based, fire-stopping spray to Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center as part of its \$1 billion expansion project. The spray helps prevent the spread of fire, smoke and noxious gases while also meeting LEED's environmental guidelines.

The supply firm also sold a green roof system to Case Western Reserve University for the school's \$50 million student center. Green roofs consist of indigenous plants that assist with noise reduction, fire prevention, and conservation of storm water run-off.

Along with projects in the collegiate and medical space, River City's construction clients have worked with the Cleveland Flats East Bank development and Cleveland Hopkins International Airport. The supply company has grown appreciably since its inception, corraling \$2 million in revenue last year with aims of doubling that figure by the end of 2014.

Powers views her business as an education, both for herself and to those she sells her products. Promoting the conservation of dwindling natural resources is something everyone could stand to learn more about, she believes.

"It's great helping educate people about making their projects more efficient and sustainable," Powers says.

The company co-owner has always been environmentally conscious, although she is a latecomer to the green building game.

She began her career in the music industry, touring with acts as a camera operator and video technician. Looking to change careers, it was her partner Berkebile who floated the idea of starting a company in the mostly male-dominated realm of building material supply.

Bring largely self-funded, the business's first months were akin to college. "It was like we were paying to learn" about the intricacies of listening to customers and dealing with fluctuating cash flow, Powers says. "The first year was a matter of establishing ourselves, if not making much money. It was all part of the process."

As a certified Female Business Enterprise (FBE) in Cleveland, River City was given a chance to bid on construction projects as required by the city's Office of Equal Opportunity. From there, the pair of female entrepreneurs had to prove their worth, a process that went more smoothly than Powers anticipated.

"We were concerned at first, but we were treated fairly" by construction companies, she says. "We never felt like people in the industry discriminated against us. Everyone gave us a fair shot. It was a great thing to see."

The supply firm currently consists of just the two co-founders, with Powers focusing on sales and her partner involved with accounting and bookkeeping. Continued financial success could mean hiring out within the next year or two, although even with the heavy workload, Powers has managed to maintain a balance of work and social life.

Meanwhile, River City will continue to offer the construction materials that make the state just a little bit greener.

"There are times when it can be overwhelming; there's always lots to do and we can't not do it," Powers says. "You just have to do what needs to be done." ■

For more information:
rivercitybuildingsolutions.com

Taylor Pember, Student at The University of Toledo through LCCC's University Partnership



Real Education is Always Worth It

Taylor Pember of Amherst is preparing for the workforce by earning an associate of science from LCCC and soon a bachelor of science in Computer Science and Engineering (CSE) from The University of Toledo through LCCC's University Partnership program.

Pember, along with her brother Austyn (also a CSE student), wisely participated in several co-op opportunities. Taylor did one at RW Beckett and two at NASA Glenn. Co-ops are often links to future employment as many employers realize it's a great way to develop future talent.

"The CSE program is very broad which is great because your co-op experience can be tailored to your specific interests. I'm more confident that a good opportunity will happen for me after I graduate because of the co-ops," Taylor said.

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