

## **Solid green An Omaha firm is set to break ground on a building expected to earn a gold rating for its environmentally friendly design.**

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DLR GROUP An architect's rendering shows DLR Group's future building in Aksarben Village. The Omaha architecture and engineering firm will break ground Friday on the project and expects to relocate by fall 2010.

From top to bottom, DLR Group's new office building will be a model of green design.

And it is expected to earn the building a gold label.

Friday, the architecture and engineering firm will break ground on an office that would become the first privately occupied building in Nebraska — and just the fourth overall in the state — with the respected LEED Gold environmental certification.

On the roof, materials will be highly reflective and white to limit how much heat the building absorbs. Under foot, there will be carpet that includes recycled nylon yarn.

Even in choosing a site in the Aksarben Village redevelopment, the company sought to build a new office that emphasized the firm's long-standing commitment to sustainable, environmentally friendly design, said Ken West, DLR Group's Omaha office leader.

"We feel it's just fundamentally good design practice," West said.

Founded in 1966 in Omaha as Dana Larson Roubal and Associates, the firm has maintained an office in Regency since the early 1970s. Today, DLR Group has offices in 15 cities across the United States. Although the firm works in areas ranging from hospitality to criminal justice, it has particular expertise in education and is credited as the country's largest K-12 school designer.

In Omaha, DLR Group was among the early planners for Aksarben Village — the office, retail and residential project replacing the former Ak-Sar-Ben horse track and arena.

That coincided with DLR facing a renovation project if it wanted to stay in Regency.

West said the firm was intrigued by Aksarben Village as a "sustainable community all in itself" and sees it as a model for revitalizing Omaha's inner city.

"We're really excited about being part of the community over there," West said.

DLR's 39,000-square-foot building encompasses just a fraction of Aksarben Village's 900,000 square feet of office space. Tenants including the University of Nebraska Foundation and Olsson Associates are in place, while Fidelity National Title will soon move into its new offices. Construction is under way on Blue Cross Blue Shield's new headquarters.

Wohlner's Grocery and Deli has relocated there, and Security National Bank, Juice Stop and Liv Lounge are open for business. On the residential side, the Broadmoor apartments are open and leasing.

For DLR, its new building will give the firm an opportunity to apply its design practices to its own office and work environment.

DLR, which will take up two of the three floors, also considers its new building a lab to demonstrate to clients how office systems operate.

A few spots in the flooring, for instance, will have clear panels to showcase the "underfloor raceways" carrying power and data lines and handling air flow around the office. In addition, the building will have special systems to monitor the office's own lighting and electrical loads, and that information then can be compared against models of energy usage in the design of other buildings.

Environmentally friendly features will be used throughout the building.

The office will capitalize on natural light and limit water usage with low-flow toilets. Concrete used on the site will include fly ash recycled from

coal plants. Toilet partitions will be made from recycled milk jugs and detergent bottles. The firm is looking at using wood flooring reclaimed from old buildings.

DLR also will buy renewable energy credits equaling all of its electrical use for at least two years.

Mike Kros, a senior associate with DLR, said: "Everyone says they're green now — everything's green. It's a matter of what that really means."

After the groundbreaking, work by Hawkins Construction is expected to start in earnest next week. DLR expects to relocate by fall 2010.

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