

Breaking Ground Contracting (BGC), which celebrated its tenth anniversary this past year, is the creation of President Mary Tappouni. In 1994, Mary graduated cum laude as one of three female students in the building construction program at the University of North Florida, then added a degree in finance and real estate. Upon graduation, Mary decided to build her home and her company in Jacksonville, Florida. BGC is a 100% woman-owned and operated multi-faceted commercial general contracting firm that focuses on sustainable, 'green' and LEED® construction, education and facilitation.

Mary's vision is embodied in her passion for sustainable/green living, and is a ground-up effort. From the kitchen in her office to her education modules to employee involvement and incentives, and the recent Women Build project for HabiJax—the Jacksonville office of Habitat for Humanity—everything is colored in Mary's green vision. She was selected by the Mayor to sit on the Jacksonville Small and Emerging Business Oversight Committee where she uses her experience to promote small business in the region. She believes strongly in making positive changes in the construction industry and in the community. Sponsoring the 2008 Women Build, the first to aim for LEED® Silver, is only one facet of that commitment.

She serves as Chair of the Child Guidance Center Board, and is the Education and Outreach Committee Chair for Associated Builders and Contractors Women's Council, through which she spearheads a mentor training program.

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Blogs: www.sustainabuild.net and www.breakinggroundeducationservices.com

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do

With your one wild and precious life?

Mary Oliver, Pulitzer Prize winning poet

The principles for running a sustainable business arise out of the intention to live a sustainable life. This nomination is a dynamic business vision that supports individuals, companies and the inter-relatedness of all—in an industry that, traditionally, contributes more to the problems of the environment than it solves. BGC offers the view that it doesn't matter what business you are in, it is the holistic vision of work, home and planet that matters. We have taken up the challenge of poets, environmentalists, and an awakened business community, understanding that each individual and business entity has its own responsibility to the planet.

Though President Mary Tappouni doesn't use the language of the poet as she creates her vision, everyone in the company understands that BGC was begun in 1997 with more in mind than the bottom line. The environmental passion of the company's president has been evident from day one. Through meetings with staff, hiring decisions and partnering choices, BGC decided it was not the time to focus on one initiative, but to build a responsible, sustainable corporation from the ground up. Tappouni met with her financial, construction and field teams and received their support in her decision to facilitate green practices in every aspect of the business; to include sustainable topics in all education programs; to embrace the USGBC's rating system and accreditations for herself and her staff; and to pursue LEED® certification for her own office renovations. In 2007, with the groundwork carefully placed, BGC hired a full time staff member to promote the company's vision and provide education to the design and construction community, in addition to creating broader community awareness. By 2008, a full time director was hired for the Education Division. Project Management, Business Development, Education Services and Safety at BGC are all headed by eminently qualified women who have raised

the company into an award-winning position. Tappouni, expressing her passion and essential values through work, has created a unique conscious business, where exceptional performance is reflected through the vision and dignity of each member of the organization. Following feminine principals of inclusion, with responsibility toward people in the community and the environment, results in leadership in sustainable practices that uplifts and educates the construction industry and the consumer. Mary encourages her employees to participate in community activities of their choosing. The company is represented in Junior Achievement Girls, YMCA, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, The Child Guidance Center, St. Johns Riverkeeper, Urban Land Institute, and the U.S. Green Building Council. BGC staff serves on the boards of The Green Building Council, The Associated Builders and Contractors, Women's Council of ABC, and the Child Guidance Center, while mentoring through several different organizations in the Jacksonville area.

The economic viability of sustainable living and building cannot be separated. One by one, BGC is educating employees, developers, builders, architects, designers, managers, realtors, facilities managers, and their subcontractors in the facts of LEED[®], simple green practices, and the financial facts. Done well, sustainable building can be no more expensive than standard building practices, and in the long term return to the owner, the community, and the planet, it will save money. Once the building community sees this as fact, they are no longer resistant. One on one, human beings want a clean community and environment for their families and companies. Overcoming old stereotypes is done with patience and respect for the opinions of others.

In pre-construction meetings for each project, managers and sub-contractors are encouraged to see the project as an ongoing part of the community, not something that ends when they walk off the site, and they in turn pass this on to field personnel. Education and development staff join with owners, architects and engineers to emphasize the importance of the environmental aspects. If the job is pursuing LEED[®] certification, then more training is given through the Education Division.

Specific goals and instructions for recycling, a clean and safe jobsite and reporting procedures are put in place prior to each project's commencement through documents such as the Waste Management Plan; Construction Activity Pollution Prevention Plan; Indoor Environmental Air Quality Plan, and others. Checklists on the job site ensure sustainable practices are part of every project. This is an initiative that BGC undertook on its own, with respect to their Core Values and Mission Statement.

The Education Division at BGC is constantly out in the business communities of Florida, presenting seminars and workshops that focus on educating about sustainability. In a great many cases, company teachers are also training representatives from contractors, subcontractors, engineering firms and architects in how to receive LEED[®] accreditation. The objective of the company's education effort is to see their efforts replicated, as this is the only way to turn an individual firm's impact into community and state impact. With the use of educational tools, including training and workshops, the company's blogs and website, and the Green Room Resource Library, BGC disseminates their hard-earned knowledge to all who would have it, including their competitors. In fact, company President Mary Tappouni is frequently heard stating that if you truly believe in the ultimate goal of green building, you want everyone to know about it and everyone to participate. This passion for doing the right thing, as well as providing economic value for her clients, creates a unique market for the organization.

The company's blog, sustainabuild.net, highlights information and experiences that will help other contractors, sub-contractors, vendors, clients and members of the community support green building by sharing their resources and knowledge. The blog is updated regularly with statistics, facts, case studies, national and international updates, and personal experiences with sustainability. It has inspired several other individuals and organizations to start their own blogs, which continues to spread the word about the advantages of environmental stewardship.

Breaking Ground's "Green Room", a resource library for engineers, architects, design professions and clients provides case studies, material samples, books, electronic data, and videos for LEED[®] registered projects or for those simply exploring options for sustainable building practices.

Through their Education Services and its blog, breakinggroundeducationservices.com, the company educates other contractors, subcontractors and many others in the built environment on how to build to LEED® standards, teaches business owners how to “Green” their businesses, understand the cost incentives to build green and develop a Corporate Social Responsibility Program. These services, including “lunch & learns” held at BGC, allow other organizations to replicate BGC’s efforts and further the cause for sustainability. With programs developed in-house such as “Faces of Green”, a photographic exhibit of people involved at the grass roots level, and “Me & Green”, a series of books developed for children, BGC reaches beyond the construction borders.

The intention to be a viable expert and resource for the building community and the community at large has exceeded expectations. The enthusiasm of the staff and all those involved in the steps to “go green” at the corporate level and to reach out through education, has been overwhelming. Educating sub-contractors and suppliers in *their* requirements adds to the cumulative savings to the environment and results in savings to the client, as they are not bearing the costs of the education of these contractors on their projects.

The company also supports the incentivizing of ‘green building’ for developers and builders through the City of Jacksonville’s Sustainable Building Ordinance. Through their work with the USGBC’s Public Advocacy committee, BGC employees have assisted in the drafting of the ordinance and will continue to support the incentives as the City implements sustainable practices. As members of organizations such as St. Johns Riverkeeper, ULI and the U.S. Green Building Council, BGC keeps up-to-date on environmental issues so that they can pass these on through their educational outlets.

Breaking Ground also keeps abreast of executive orders and initiatives at the state level, and is working with city and state leaders to promote environmental stewardship and green building. With the company’s innovative approach to green building, they are already poised to meet the requirements for LEED® on State of Florida projects.

Throughout the community, the staff is constantly promoting the importance of sustainable building and living. In addition to serving on the Jacksonville Mayoral Commission on Small and Emerging Business, Tappouni was a Mayoral Appointee to JSEB Oversight Committee. She and her staff have been interviewed multiple times in the media as experts on sustainable building and they are invited to speak throughout the State of Florida on matter of sustainable construction. They are ambassadors for green. On the BGC sponsored HabiJax Women Build project, volunteers learned why affordable green is healthier and more practical in *their* daily lives. The ripple has now reached into the community and is widening its effect. As more people implement green building practices, the market will drive costs down, which opens sustainability to more people, thus meeting BGC’s mission and core values.

Sustainable education begins at the level of the individual. All employees are continually educated in green building practices through regular office education modules. Through weekly employee meetings, all department heads are charged with remembering to ask the question “how does ‘green’ fit into this project.” Regular training programs for field personnel focus on the same question and employees are rewarded for thinking outside the normal construction procedures to upgrade safety and sustainability.

At BGC’s home office, they begin with the kitchen. Plates, cups and napkins are biodegradable—some made from vegetable starches which degrade almost immediately in the landfill. Recycling is mandatory, and all paper is recycled or reused. Green housekeeping and procurement is standard operating procedure, which includes organic cotton shirts for personnel, recycled or post consumer office supplies and making individual notepads for office staff from cut down architectural plans.

Employees welcome ideas to implement recycling, energy savings, water use reduction and other ways of conserving in the home, drawn from programs already in place at the company. Every facet models integrity, including the company’s investment in renewable energy, on behalf of its staff, through TerraPass for all flights, rental cars, company vehicles, and personal vehicles, as well as

lodging obtained through Florida's Green Lodging Program. Outside of Florida, they make every effort to seek hotels that implement water saving and energy-saving features. There is no detail so small that it will not benefit from BGC's plan for what they will do with this "one wild and precious life."

Employees are also offered incentives which have included, to date, \$1500 toward the down payment on a fuel efficient or hybrid vehicle, and \$500 toward the reduction of potable water use in their yards by incorporating native plants, rain and/or moisture sensors and water saving measures inside their homes. Examples of small ways they can make a big difference are provided in tangible methods at bi-weekly meetings. Employees have been provided compact fluorescent bulbs and special aerators to incorporate at home to familiarize them with efficiency measures. Along with these items, a focus on a LEED® credit associated with the incentive is discussed in detail. This way, the entire team is given a new item to learn about, discuss in detail with each other and focus on implementing on all projects—and in their daily life if applicable. Employees feel stability and security in working for an innovative firm, and enjoy being a part of that innovation. They begin thinking outside the box and engaging in the everyday application, always asking what can be done to make a project green, greener, or safer.

BGC has won notable awards for safety on the jobsite, because all recognize that job safety aids in the sustainability of the company through the health of its employees and other personnel supporting the job—another way of protecting an environment. BGC is proof of the individual's ability to impact their time and space in a dynamic way that will flow into future generations. One company's vision has empowered others to reach higher and see further into a sustainable "wild and precious" future.

www.habijax.org/files/Post_Women_Build_Release.pdf (article)

www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/102107bus_210060158.shtml (interview)

PARTIAL LIST OF AWARDS

2008---Jacksonville Business Journal 50 Fastest Growing Private Companies-*Number 9*
 2008---Associated Builders and Contractors Excellence Award for General Construction
 2008---Associated Builders and Contractors Award of Merit
 2008---Associated Builders and Contractors Platinum STEP Award for Safety
 2007---Jacksonville Business Journal "The List" of Commercial Remodelers
 2007---Jacksonville Business Journal "Woman of Influence"
 2007---Jacksonville Journal "40 under 40 Up and Comers"
 2007---First Coast Business Alliance Construction Firm of the Year
 2006---Mayoral Appointee to JSEB Oversight Committee
 2006---Jacksonville Business Journal "The List of Women Owned Business."
 2006---Associated Builders and Contractors National Platinum Step Safety Award
 2006---Associated Builders and Contractors Excellence Award for Specialty Construction
 2005---Associated Builders and Contractors Excellence Award for Commercial Construction
 2005---Associated Builders and Contractors National Gold Step Safety Award
 2005---Associated Builders and Contractors Excellence Award for Historical Restoration
 2005---Associated Builders and Contractors Excellence Award for Specialty Construction
 2004---Mayoral Commission on Small and Emerging Business
 2004---Associated Builders and Contractors National Gold Step Safety Award
 2003---First Coast Business Alliance WBE Construction Firm of the Year