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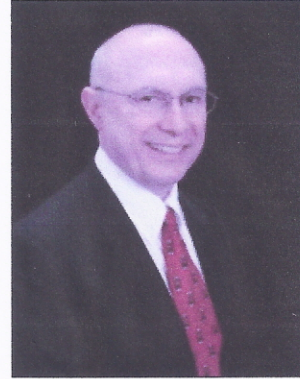
## Houston Heroes

### John Porretto: Leader of Sustainable Building in Houston

by Vicki Wolf, January 2012

John Porretto has led sustainable building practices and facility operations for health care and higher education for more than two decades in Houston. Today he continues to promote energy efficiency, water conservation, and environmentally responsible practices, helping not-for-profits secure funding for Platinum and higher LEED certified capital projects.

Porretto was featured as a *Houston Hero* on the CLEAN website in 2005 after his work on the construction of the Gold LEED-certified School of Nursing and Student Community Center at the UT Houston Health Science Center. The building was the largest green academic building in the Southwest and still is the only gold LEED-certified building in the Texas Medical Center



From his involvement in the project, Porretto learned the benefits of using sustainable materials and methods in various aspects of building new buildings. The 195,000 sq. ft. School of Nursing and Student Community Center features recycling of grey water for watering landscaping, and a roof that is landscaped for energy savings and solar panel-ready; recycled and non-toxic building materials; and special glass that invites daylight while blocking heat. Many sustainable features of the building have provided a healthful, comfortable working environment, and deliver significant energy and maintenance costs savings.

Porretto is not a sociologist or an environmentalist. He has a strong accounting background. As chief financial officer for the UT Health Science Center when the School of Nursing building was conceived, he was initially drawn to sustainable practices by their influence on economic and health concerns. "The numbers are indisputable," Porretto says. "Operating costs for all utilities of the building were less than \$190,000 per year. Comparable buildings at the UT Health Science Center, without energy efficiency features, were approximately four times more expensive to operate.

Porretto has spent much of his career working with non-profit health care and educational organizations. He is disappointed about organizations that still believe that building efficient, sustainable buildings is too costly. "Projects based on such first cost thinking, almost invariably result in buildings that are expensive to operate and maintain and that can present quality issues that affect the health and well-being of those who work there," he says. "Because of the tax breaks enjoyed by non-profit organizations there should be an imperative that they construct every building in a highly sustainable and efficient manner so that funds raised can serve the people and projects core to these organizations."

According to Porretto, the benefits and cost savings of building in sustainable ways extends beyond maintenance and operating costs. He says it is important to look at the bigger picture for people and for the planet. "Imagine the impact on the marketability and cost of green products if higher education and health care united in procuring environmentally safe materials and products," he says. "We need to think about the social economics of the country. We need to band together to get the best products that do not harm the environment or people."

While Porretto was leading operations at UT Health Science Center at Houston, his team incorporated sustainability practices system-wide. Implementation of the initiative included about a dozen projects that involved reducing waste and use of energy including:

- a comprehensive energy management program
- an expanded recycling program
- lighting retrofit projects
- a sustainable ceiling tile initiative
- reusable bags provided to vendors for deliveries

Resources saved or reduced during the two- year program included savings of more than 2,800,000 kwh of electricity; 4,800,000 gallons of water; and 1,300,000 pounds of recycled materials.

Today, Porretto continues his mission to bring sustainability and best practices to construction, rehabilitation and operation of facilities. He works with private business and public organizations to help them achieve financial success through sustainable practices. "My principles guide what I do and the work I choose to be involved in," he says.

With his company, VerdeCapitalResources, LLC, Porretto helps organizations set and achieve



sustainability goals. He evaluates sustainable retrofit opportunities and offers practical alternatives to reduce energy costs by 30 to 70 percent.

Porretto also plans to continue building and consulting on residential projects on a low-volume basis. "I only want to work with people who are serious about sustainability and disaster-resistant construction," he says. Recently Porretto built a 1,900 sq. ft home with his step son. "We built it out of all hot-dipped, galvanized steel. The home was engineered to endure 150 mile-per-hour winds and to operate in a highly energy efficient manner."

For the future, Porretto says we should be moving toward a restoration economy in which existing buildings are restored and made more efficient rather than tearing them down. "It is disturbing to watch the demolition of a house or a building," he says. "Why not deconstruct these and reuse the material, which in many cases is of higher quality than what is presently on the market."

Moving forward, Porretto says he will continue to be "more courageous and outspoken about the importance of building and operating facilities in a sustainable fashion. Boards and the people who support public institutions should expect nothing less."

**Related Links and Suggested Readings:**

[Companies of the Future: Clean, Energy Efficient, Productive and Profitable](#)

[John Porretto- working towards a sustainable future](#)

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