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Green Building Council membership grows in South Florida

South Florida Business Journal - by [Paul Brinkmann](#)

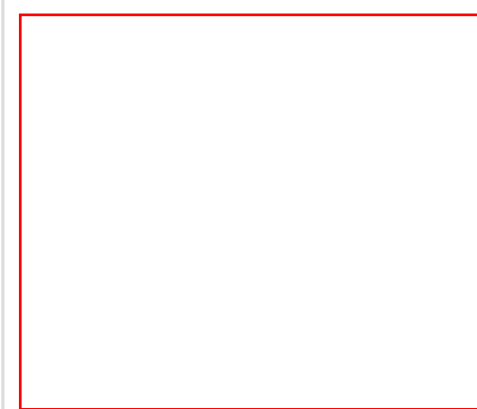
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South Florida membership in the **U.S. Green Building Council** is growing so fast that the regional chapter recently split into three branches, with one for each county.

The council is the leading national organization promoting more environmentally friendly building practices. It was founded by architects interested in greener



building practices and is well known for its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification program.

The Broward County branch held its first event this week in Miramar, to educate members and interested businesspeople about renewable energy credits - financial units of support for clean, renewable electricity.

Chapter VP Olga Alvarez said membership is about 500 now, having doubled in the last three years. Broward branch members said the reorganization is part of growing demand and interest in green building.

"People were asking for more events focused on local topics closer to home, so we've reorganized," said Alvarez, who also runs **Project Coordinating Services LLC**, a green consulting firm in Hollywood.

On Tuesday night, first-time visitors to the council's events included local contractor Wayne Messam, of Hollywood-based **Asset Builders LLC**.

"We have recognized that builders need to know about renewable energy credits to communicate with architects and clients," he said. "We are fascinated about LEED and green power potential."

Messam said Asset Builders has a contract with Broward County to build affordable housing in the Washington Park neighborhood west of downtown Fort Lauderdale. He said he is looking for ways to make housing more affordable by cutting utility costs, if possible, without adding to building costs significantly.

"Ongoing maintenance and utility costs are a big concern in affordable housing, obviously," he said.

The Broward event featured a presentation by **Renewable Choice Energy**, a Colorado company that sells and markets renewable energy credits and other green services.

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Gretchen Dudon, the company's regional sales manager, told attendees they could have bigger returns on their green investments if they advertise their buildings' green components.

"We help market the building as a green building," she said. "We tell people about the pollution they are offsetting by building green."

If a builder cannot achieve greater energy efficiency with solar power or conservation, they can purchase renewable energy credits from companies like Renewable Choice. Those credits can help a building achieve a higher rating from the LEED program.

Then, Dudon's company will also tell visitors and clients how much energy the company is offsetting. For example, if a standard energy rate for a 200,000-square-foot building was about 2.34 million kilowatt-hours, it could offset 70 percent of that over two years for about \$26,000. That represents the additional cost of clean electricity generated by real clean energy power plants in South Florida.

Renewable Choice would then create posters and materials explaining that the offsets amount to not driving a car about 2.4 million miles.

"Whether you want to fight global warming or increase energy independence, there are a lot of good reasons for doing this," said Hector Samario, energy services consultant for **Honeywell** in Pembroke Pines. He is the new chairman of the Green Building Council's Broward branch.

Dudon said renewable energy credits that purchase units of wind power are available in some **Whole Foods** stores, for environmental conscious shoppers.

Whole Foods spokesman Russ Benblatt said the credits are not yet available in Florida stores, but should be soon.

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