



# *Tribune* — Waunakee — **eNEWS**

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## **New Benedictine monastery strives for zero carbon footprint**

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The Benedictine Women of Madison at Holy Wisdom Monastery have long been known as stewards of the land.

Years ago, a project at the monastery off of Hwy. M in Westport restored nearly 100 acres of wetlands and prairie, along with what was called Lost Lake, bringing back an important feature in the Lake Mendota watershed.

Work is still under way on the new Benedictine monastery. In order to achieve LEED certification, any materials that go unused are sorted and recycled.

So it may come as no surprise to some that the new monastery under way is being constructed in a green manner, making the most of the earth's renewable resources as possible.

Neal Smith of the Holy Wisdom monastery recently led the Tribune on a tour of the new monastery. At 30,000 square feet, it will be half the size of the former building.

While the new monastery is nearing completion, the former building was razed in January with over 99 percent of the building materials reused or recycled - mostly on site.

Smith said the new monastery better meets the sisters' needs. The large Benedictine House lacked energy efficiency, so the new monastery was built to half the size with a goal to ultimately achieve a "zero carbon footprint."

Smith said the goal is to receive 63 of 69 possible points toward LEED certification, the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Green Building Rating System.

"There's a strong probability that we will," Smith said. "If we do, it would be the greenest LEED certified building in the United States."

Some of the features include geothermal heating and cooling systems using 39 wells, active solar energy generation, reduced energy consumption, reduced water usage, along with stormwater runoff facilities such as green roofs, pervious concrete in the parking lots, rain gardens, rain barrels and prairie restoration. Space for education in environmental sustainability and green building has also been included.

Only the ground floor of the original Benedictine House remains of that building, and it houses the mechanicals. Its green roof, along with a portion of the new monastery rooftop, includes soil trays to begin plantings for prairie restoration.

Photovoltaic panels provide 15 percent of the monastery's energy, and the windows throughout the building have been custom designed for efficiency. Nearly every area of the building has been designed to receive natural light, and solar tubes have been installed to provide natural lighting, as well.

When the outdoor temperature is between 60 and 74 degrees, the heating and cooling system will send an

e-mail to each occupant of the monastery informing them that this is a ventilation day, so they can open windows.

The goal is to add enough photovoltaic panels so the building can generate 100 percent of the energy it uses, Smith said.

Yet the sense of the building as a place of worship is still in the design. The octagon shaped, multi-purpose worship area reflects the sisters' philosophy: it is both inclusive and hospitable, Smith pointed out.

It can also be used for conferences and concerts, and for those events can seat up to 400.

A Columbarium has been installed in the memorial garden to hold the ashes of the deceased.

The landscaping surrounding the monastery will be completed with prairie grasses and native plants, and participants in the volunteer and community program are currently planting.

Smith said a program for single women allows them to work 20 hours per week on outdoor projects and spend the rest of the week taking part in monastic life.

The entire project is expected to be finished on July 6, and afterwards, the new building maintenance engineer will spend about three weeks fine tuning the mechanicals, Smith said.

The sisters and other staff will move in July 31, and the first worship service is expected to held Aug. 30.

The Benedictine Women of Madison's mission statement is "Weaving prayer, hospitality, justice and care of the earth into a shared way of life as an ecumenical Benedictine community."

It seems the new monastery will go far in achieving that goal.

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