

News

Healthy high-rises

by Kate Druett

Imagine working in a building that kept you healthy.

Fewer toxins would pollute your workspace, breathing would be easier, headaches would be a thing of the past along with sore, strained eyes and dehydrated skin.

Best of all, it would help you work — increasing your productivity and efficiency. Though it might sound like a dream, such buildings are fast becoming a reality here in New Zealand.

“Green buildings” are on the rise worldwide. They are designed to be energy and water efficient, minimise waste, reduce environmental toxins and promote good air quality and ventilation.

Green Building Council chief executive Jane Henley says Meridian Energy, BNZ, NZ Post and Nike are among the corporate giants on board with the scheme. The Ministry for the Environment is also working on a government programme to promote sustainable building growth.

However most office employees are working in buildings that don't take environmental or health factors into consideration. As a result Henley says they may be suffering from “sick building syndrome”. Symptoms include headaches, sore eyes, dry skin and tiredness.

City worker Kerri Ross has spent years working in malls and office buildings. She experiences dry skin, irritated eyes and frequent dehydration as a result of air-conditioning and poor ventilation. Green buildings are a positive move for employee health and happiness as well as the environment she says.

“You spend a huge chunk of your life at work, it can make you feel like a caged rat. Anything that made it more comfortable and healthier would give us a lot more quality of life.”

Green buildings are all about merging social, economic and environmental benefits, says Henley. While green buildings may initially be 2-6 per cent more expensive than standard buildings, the cost is offset by lower running costs and increased productivity. By being involved with the scheme companies are also “future-proofing their investments” against possibilities such as carbon tax.

“There has to be economic benefits for it to be viable — the added business value is enormous,” she says.

Designing work spaces to encourage optimum employee performance is another factor crucial to the buildings' success.

Henley says every green building is monitored after its completion. Studies from the United States show companies working from green buildings have a 10 per cent increase in production with decreased employee sick days, reported headaches and ill health.

Building materials are chosen for their environmentally friendly properties and the energy required to source them. Building site selection considers the surrounding environment and most appropriate use of land. Even paint, carpet and furniture are analysed for their effect on health.

Buildings are ranked by the Green Council according to the above factors. Six stars are awarded to a building of optimum environmental and health standards.



PHOTO: KATE DRUETT

Festival time for docos

By Lisa Sloan

Budding filmmakers will showcase their documentaries to an international audience at the second annual Documentary Film Festival, held in Lorne St's Academy Cinema this month.

The festival is the second of its kind, run by the DOCNZ Festival Trust, a non-profit organisation which promotes New Zealand documentaries locally and internationally.

This year's festival will feature documentaries that have never been screened in New Zealand.

The trust received 500 entries this year, but the field has been narrowed down to 136 entries from 21 countries.

Highlights include *The Blood of Yingzhou District*, which tells the story of China's Aids crisis through the eyes of a orphaned Chinese toddler who contracted Aids from his parents.

The festival will be held in Auckland and Wellington, with best of screenings in Dunedin and Christchurch.

Dan Shanahan, founding trustee of DOCNZ, says the festival will help filmmakers build up a reputation in the industry.

“We want to help filmmakers get work screened and exposed,” he says.

As the trust is a non-profit, volunteer organisation, it needs sponsorship to fund the festival.

Shanahan says attracting sponsorship is always difficult, so the trust approached companies it thought would benefit from the festival.

“It's not an easy task, but we

put in the ground work last year which has been very helpful.”

This year's sponsors include TVNZ, Heritage Hotels, Saatchi and Saatchi, Creative New Zealand and Timeline Productions.

The organisation also relies on volunteers and interns to organise the festival. DOCNZ has four fulltime interns from both New Zealand and Europe, and attracts volunteers through advertising and word of mouth.

“Whatever volunteers can assist us with is more than welcome,” says Shanahan. “They help us tremendously.”

Gina Dellabarca, owner and operator of Star Publicity and a volunteer for DOCNZ, says the festival has benefits for both filmmakers and the public.

“The festival provides another avenue for filmmakers to showcase their work to the public, in a market place where that can be difficult, especially for documentary filmmakers,” she says.

“The public also gets the opportunity to see a wider range of great documentary films that they might not otherwise have the opportunity to see.”

Dellabarca says the popularity of documentaries is growing around the world and the festival caters to this demand.

“DOCNZ provides for the public's growing appetite for informative, intelligent, controversial and insightful entertainment,” she says.

The Documentary Film Festival will be held from September 7 to 17 in Auckland and September 25 to October 4 in Wellington.

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