



Conversation Turned Collaboration: '05 Classmates Join Forces to Create a Green Workspace

When the lease ran out on her company's building, Eileen Straughan '05, knew it was time to move. As CEO of Straughan Environmental, Inc., a consulting firm that specializes in helping public and private companies achieve environmental compliance and improve sustainability, Eileen was ready to leave her old inefficient building behind and ensure that her own company was adhering to the same high standards she held for her clients.

"I felt as an environmental firm, we really wanted to walk the talk, and have a space that is more reflective of what we value," she said. "In all our projects, we give our clients the ability to work within infrastructure which is necessary for a growing society, but in a way that preserves and protects the natural environment on which we all depend."



After purchasing a new building less than two miles from Straughan Environmental's old location, Eileen knew she would need help from an experienced architect to help convert the one-story, brick-on-block space into a model of sustainable design. That's when she turned to Charles Alexander '05, president of Alexander Design Studio and Eileen's classmate from Leadership Maryland's Class of 2005.

"While we were going through Leadership Maryland together, Eileen and I had struck up conversations just because we were in related fields and complimentary professions," said Charles. "When she reached out to me about needing help to create the environment in which her staff would be working, it was an easy project for our team to be interested in. We want projects that are different and that are about something, and to Eileen, this was about getting at the heart of how they operate and achieving a higher level of sustainability to align with their corporate philosophy."

Alexander Design Studio was experienced in green design, having previously worked on Overlook at Clipper Mill, a modern duplex housing development that had achieved LEED Gold status.

"With Straughan Environmental, it was new for us to be looking at a renovation project within an existing building, as opposed to a fresh build," said Charles. "We sat down with Eileen and discussed what made sense and what didn't, what was doable and what wasn't, and set objectives for the organization and the efficiency of the space."

Charles' team incorporated many innovative elements into the design to make the building more sustainable and green. The existing black roof was replaced with a white membrane roof that is reflective and doesn't trap heat in the summer. A ventilation system and high-efficiency mechanical units ensure a healthy comfortable environment. Nine solar tubes were installed in the roof, in conjunction with pale wall colors and an adjustable lighting system, to maximize the natural lighting of the space. The open floorplan features all Energy Star®-rated appliances and workstations made with refurbished and recycled materials. The layout was designed to maximize views to the outside, which was landscaped with native plants that don't require much fertilizer or watering.

"We placed a high value on indoor air quality," said Eileen. "We were very careful in every choice that we made, and our architects helped us achieve that."



Straughan Environmental moved into its completed new headquarters in July 2010. Eileen and Charles had initially targeted LEED Silver certification, but ultimately achieved LEED Gold – one of the industry's highest standards for sustainable design. And Straughan's employees have continued to implement new green practices.

"Our employees have enjoyed getting into new sustainable activities. Since moving in, we've started a composting program and compost all our plant-based kitchen waste here on site. We have a beehive and make our own honey now, too," said Eileen. "We measure our energy and water consumption, and our waste generation and recycling and set green key performance indicators (KPIs) annually so that we continuously improve our sustainability performance as a company."

"It's amazing to look back at this project, because sustainable products and technologies have become much more mainstream now and much of what was innovative then has become, thankfully, more prevalent now," said Charles. "This project has stood the test of time."



Collaborating on this project was a fortunate result of Eileen and Charles having met and discussed their common interests while participating in Leadership Maryland, and both say they are grateful for their experiences in the program.

"I never looked at Leadership Maryland as a marketing tool, so much as an opportunity to look holistically at the State where I do business and understand the connections between the business world and government world," said Charles. "From that standpoint, it was incredibly valuable and I enjoyed meeting people from such a different cross-section of professions and experiences."

"The first thing I would say about my Leadership Maryland experience is that it gave me so much insight into different areas of the state and their economies and what's important both economically and socially in each region," said Eileen. "Plus, I know I can pick up the phone and

call anyone in my Leadership Maryland class and we will always have the common experience of being in the class of '05.”

To learn more about Straughan Environmental, please visit straughanenvironmental.com. To learn more about Charles Alexander design studio, please visit brokenboxes.com. To learn more about Leadership Maryland, please visit LeadershipMD.org