A building for learning, a building to learn from

BY JESSICA SIBLEY
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CLEMSON — Back in the 1970s, Lee Hall was constructed with the idea of open exploration and design in mind, allowing students to collaborate and learn from one another.

In 2012, that foundation of peer education and research dynamics has blossomed into a building where students house their studios, classrooms and overall learning space.

The recent 14-month renovation of Lee Hall III — which added another 56,000 square feet to the existing Lee I and Lee II — has given students an opportunity to have an active hand in the building's sustainability and overall energy-saving potential.

According to John Jacques, professor emeritus of architecture at Clemson and design facilitator of the project, the building is a prime example of how feasible it is to construct buildings in a green way and better our overall ecology on a worldwide basis.

"This building brings together three things," Jacques said. "It teaches our students by being exactly tuned to specific learning in a design school. It allows our students to better collaborate between areas of architecture, landscape design, city planning, real estate development, historical preservation, visual arts and construction science. And finally, it gives a blueprint to the betterment of our ecology."

Jim Long, professor of architecture at Clemson, said five years ago, a building like this wasn't possible.

"The problem lay in the fact that it cost so much more to construct a green building than it did to construct a conventional building," Long said. "The gap between the cost, technology and expertise was just too large. Now, all those factors are matching up, or at least getting close to matching up, which gave us the green light to go ahead."

Long added that each aspect of the building is a step in the right direction when it comes to raising the bar of green construction.

"Clemson wants to be a leader in this category and Lee Hall III is a great example of how we are doing that," Long added. "It's cutting edge."

The building itself requires very little energy, running off of the light from huge skylights, large open panes of glass on the north and south side of the building, geothermal wells that collect water and send it through pipes in the building, which heat and cool the floors for better temperature control, auto-open windows for ventilation, the largest green roof in the Southeast and wall side flat screen monitors that gauge the energy use, temperature, humidity and other energy factors of running the building each day.

"Students can then monitor these readings, which in turn can help them research how to make the energy consumption even less," Jacques said.

"Lee Hall is a true example of where we can go when it comes to energy saving and top quality education through exploration."

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Above, John Jacques, professor and design leader of Lee Hall III, overlooks the largest "green" seeded roof in the Southeast. Below, students at Lee Hall III are able to work either in closed desk environments or in open meeting spaces throughout the building.