



## SPREADING THE GOSPEL OF GREEN

*In the rural town of Independence, a developer atones for past environmental mistakes with a project he hopes will push sustainable building beyond Oregon's urban centers.*

One block west of the Main Street facades of yesteryear sits the beginnings of a prototypical building of tomorrow. To the untrained eye, Independence Station is an unremarkable concrete skeleton that's a long way from completion. But if you know what to look for, you can see why this unfolding 57,000-square-foot complex of shops, offices and housing in small-town Independence signals a new era in Oregon's green-building movement.

That 1930s-style generator just inside the construction fence? It's fueled by biodiesel made from vegetable oil. It lights the job site, powers construction tools and will electrify the finished building.

Those bundles of hose poking up through the foundation? They'll snake through cement floors and interior walls, delivering 70-degree water to warm the building in winter and keep it cool during the summer.

What about the pair of beat-up water tanks behind the building, each bigger than a school bus? Those behemoths, salvaged from an old Wilsonville mental hospital, will be buried and used to not only collect rainwater to flush toilets and irrigate the landscaping but also to store "waste heat" emitted by the building's diesel generators.

According to computer models that predict a building's energy usage, owner/developer Steven Ribeiro and his tenants stand to save a whopping 74% on their utility bills compared to a similar building designed to meet minimum energy code. That percentage — described as "really, really good" by one green-building consultant — also should help Independence Station earn a mark of environmental distinction that no building in Oregon has yet attained: LEED platinum.

After six years of hurdling the certified, silver and gold standards established by the U.S. Green Building Council, the leading arbiter of environmentally friendly and energy-efficient construction, Oregon's green commercial building industry is finally leaping toward the highest bar. Four buildings currently under construction are aiming for a platinum rating, including Ribeiro's, with at least one other aspirant slated to break ground this year.

When it comes to saving energy, Independence Station is arguably the most inventive of the lot. It's also the only one located outside the city limits of Portland or Eugene. And, in stark contrast to Gerding/Edlen Development Co., the green-building juggernaut behind each of the other four platinum projects, Independence Station's Ribeiro has never completed a project bigger than an apartment-building remodel — let alone one that meets the nation's most stringent environmental design benchmark.

His inexperience is balanced by a seasoned design team that is helping realize several aggressive energy-saving ideas and raising hopes that this project can spread the green-building gospel beyond the state's urban milieu.

"What Steven is saying is, 'I believe I can build a high-density green building in a small town in rural Oregon, and I'm going to demonstrate that others can do this as well,'" says Ralph DiNola of Green Building Services, the Portland consulting firm that is managing the LEED certification process for Independence Station and more than five dozen others in the United States, Canada and China. "When this building is finished, it's going to be a great story to talk about."

Developer Steve Ribeiro is making the 57,000- square-foot Independence Station a sustainable showcase that includes retail, condos, offices and a biofuels lab run by Oregon State University. Ribeiro aims for a platinum LEED designation.

Ribeiro, an affable man his mid-40s, says his reasons for building green have less to do with making money than with his belief that the world's oil production has peaked, requiring a dramatic shift to alternative fuels, and his desire to atone for nearly two decades of investing in shoddily built, auto-oriented real estate, mostly in his native Southern California.

"I've been leaving problems in my wake instead of solutions," says Ribeiro. "When my great-grandkids look at what I did, I want them to be proud. I don't want them to say, 'Look, Grandpa put up that Costco!'"

Ribeiro, whose father made a living building condominiums near the family's home in San Marino, Calif., started buying and selling homes and apartment complexes there in the mid-1980s. None remain among his current list of properties, which he declines to value but says range from "fixer houses" in the Salem area to a 10-acre lot in Riverside, Calif., to a 68-acre parcel of farmland in Kuna, Idaho.

Kuna, a fast-growing suburb of Boise, is home to Ribeiro's most ambitious venture, a \$50-million-plus development called Water's Edge. Its New Urbanist elements — a town square, 10 acres of greenspace and the promise of "European-style sidewalk cafes" — are straight out of *Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*, the 2000 book that Ribeiro says transformed him into a promoter of multi-use buildings and compact, walkable neighborhoods.

Water's Edge won a design award last year from a Idaho nonprofit that recognizes smart growth. Ribeiro says he has the financing in place to start building the village center and several of its 395 homes this year.

But he hopes to make his biggest splash in Independence, population 7,500, located 12 miles southwest of Salem on the Willamette River. He moved there from San Bernardino, Calif., in 1997, opened a real-estate appraisal business with his wife and became one of the city's biggest fans.

"We bought a \$400 Honda mower, left it on our porch for three years and it never got stolen," says Ribeiro, moments before ducking out of a mid-afternoon shower and into Taylor's Fountain & Gifts, where he's greeted by the owner of the Main Street general store that dates to 1882. "People know you, they talk to you," he says. "It's a good, small town.

"I love this town and I wanted to do something here that was right and fun."

Independence Station, in the heart of downtown Independence is shooting for a LEED platinum designation with its aggressive sustainable design features.

IN 2004, RIBEIRO BOUGHT a half-block parcel from the Independence Urban Renewal Agency for \$175,000 and a promise to erect a mixed-use building there by June 2007. It was prime downtown real estate — opposite the new \$6 million library, which opened in September 2003, and a block from Main Street's only stop sign — but the land's previous occupant, a ramshackle car-battery shop, "wasn't the kind of thing you expect to anchor downtown," says Portland architect Mark Seder.

The city hired Seder to explore options for the site, then forged a development agreement with Ribeiro to build Independence Station because his vision "fit with what we're trying to do downtown," says city manager Greg Ellis. Since 2001, the City of Independence has spent more than \$1 million on amenities such as ornamental streetlights, widened sidewalks and a Riverfront Park amphitheater in a bid to enliven its quaint downtown.

A sustainable showcase such as Independence Station brings notice as well as new investment, says Ellis, and already has helped lure more development: A Vancouver, Wash., developer should begin construction this spring on an eight-theater multiplex one block south. “Smart money is coming to Independence,” says Ribeiro, who holds the option on another downtown property and says he hopes to develop others.

Current drawings of Independence Station show 14,000 square feet of ground-floor retail, technology-rich office space and eight third-story condo units with open floor plans and natural light streaming through floor-to-ceiling windows. But its most compelling attraction may be in the basement, where the public will be allowed to peek into a 900-square-foot biofuels lab run by Oregon State University. That’s where waste cooking oil from local restaurants — collected by a used tanker truck that Ribeiro has already re-emblazoned with a slick “Energy for Independence” logo — will be used to power everything from overhead lights to kitchen toasters.

Eventually, Ribeiro plans to process oilseed crops grown by local farmers into fuel for his generators and for the diesel-powered shuttle bus he plans to operate between Independence and next-door Monmouth.

Another notable green feature is the plan to distill and reuse the building’s wastewater using a steam condenser that relies on vacuums and low-temperature waste heat — a system seldom used outside of industrial plants.

“We’re trying to avoid throwing anything away,” explains lead engineer C. Mark Penrod, a principal of Balzhiser & Hubbard Engineers in Eugene. So far, he says, they’ve done a remarkable job. Of more than a dozen LEED-qualified projects his firm has done, Penrod says Independence Station’s projected 74% energy savings “takes the cake.”

Ribeiro hopes to accelerate the industry’s march toward sustainability by investing in the next generation of building materials. He’s partnered with an engineer in Boise to manufacture structural insulated panels with built-in green utilities such as radiant tubing and photovoltaic cells. He’s flown to Wisconsin to pursue a manufacturing deal with the maker of a new nontoxic wood treatment that prevents rot, and to Denver to meet with an award-winning University of Colorado architect whose bio-based building materials he’d like to mass-produce.

“We need to make serious advances in these old technologies,” says Ribeiro, who characterizes his ventures as “taking building out of the dark ages.”

His first test awaits in downtown Independence, where his half-finished project lies strangely silent. Ribeiro poured the foundation and the footings for Independence Station before the architectural plans were fully drawn to avoid paying capital-gains taxes on the sale of some California real estate. Now he says he’s awaiting more drawings and subcontractor bids before determining what combination of bank loans, energy-related grants and real-estate sale proceeds he’ll need to finance the last \$10 million of what he expects to be a \$15 million project.

Neither cost nor delay seems to fluster the buoyant Ribeiro. Frustration surfaces only when discussing the string of “thoughtlessly” designed apartment complexes he once bought, where cheap rain gutters, un-insulated pipes and shaded swimming pools underscored what he calls that industry’s “dump-and-run” mentality.

At least here in Independence, he says, “I’m doing the right thing — and having a blast.”