

Trex co-founder donates one discovery to help make another 'Discovery' green

By Mark R. Dorolek
The Winchester Star

Winchester — A local resident has donated about \$60,000 in material that will make the new Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum more environmentally friendly.

Roger A. Wittenberg, chief executive officer of Cottonwood Manufacturing and its parent company, International Supply Consortium of Purcellville, has donated about 35 tons of COZA — an insulation material made from cellulose.

“The most cost-effective and best material to use for this is recycled newspaper,” said Wittenberg, a Frederick County resident.

The material is treated with non-toxic and non-corrosive chemicals that make it fire-resistant. The insulation is compressed through a machine and hardens, and is then cut down to the studs.

According to the U.S. Department of Energy, COZA and other types of spray insulation cost a little more, but can save money by reducing utility costs and construction time.

The traditional method of rolling out insulation and tacking it to a wall leaves space around wires and pipes in the wall and allows outside air to enter, Wittenberg said.

“There is no reason that if you have a considerable-sized home, that your heating bill for the month should be more than \$60 or \$70,” he said, adding that even a 30,000-square-foot home would have an energy bill of about \$90 a month.

“When the material is sprayed on, it goes over and around wires and will plug any holes that are in the wall,” Wittenberg said.

Installing COZA or other spray insulation can double the “R-value,” which indicates insulation’s effectiveness, according to the DOE.

Wittenberg said his company also wants to donate some insulated concrete forms for the 30,000-square-foot project, planned for a 3.5-acre site in Jim Barnett Park.

This is not Wittenberg’s first involvement with an environmentally based company. He was a co-founder of Trex Co. Inc. of Winchester, which developed a way to make a wood-like material from plastic bags and sawdust.

Wittenberg said he sees the insulation and concrete forms as much a catalyst for the environmental market as Trex's building material was in the 1980s.

The museum's executive director, Peggy McKee, said the new facility would use the concrete forms — concrete walls with insulated foam poured between two panels that form an interlocking system — but the amount needed for the structure has not been determined.

“Roger has set high benchmarks for other corporations to follow,” she said.

The insulation and the concrete forms will help the museum to receive a “platinum” rating — a nationally accepted designation that denotes high-performing green buildings — from the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, McKee said.

The facility will have a wind turbine, a sod roof with landscaping, a closed-loop geothermal heating and cooling system — which will use the earth's natural warmth to heat and cool the building — and other technologies that will make it as environmentally friendly as possible.

McKee said she hopes Wittenberg's generosity would spur more people to give materials or donations to the museum.

Interest in the museum has peaked since a groundbreaking ceremony on April 21, she said.

About \$4.5 million has been raised for the facility. The goal is to raise \$10 million, with \$2 million used for start-up costs and new exhibits.

“It is a barn-raising mentality that has become part of the community, and it is that spirit that will make all this come true,” McKee said.

The construction is tied to the fundraising, so no completion date has been established.