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## 'Green' school being built in Palm Beach County

By Kyara Lomer

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It's more than an environmentally friendly building; it's a new approach to hands-on education.

Ground was broken recently for Florida's first green elementary school at [Florida Atlantic University's](#) Pine Jog Environmental Education Center near West Palm Beach. The project includes a new facility for the Pine Jog center.

The environment-centered curriculum's goal is to get young students thinking green, so they will get an early start on tackling environmental issues, such as drought and global warming, said Michael Davis, Pine Jog board member.

"It's an incredibly good idea, because what we do is teach kids and teach teachers about the environment," Davis said. "We want to set an example and show others how you can work together in partnership and build green buildings."

The school is expected to open in August 2008, but not everyone is as confident about the project.

The Audubon Society of the Everglades expressed concern when the project was in its initial planning stages that while schools are necessary, they bring concrete, garbage and increased traffic flow, said Rosa Durando, conservation chairwoman. Those concerns remain, she said.

Pine Jog's 150-acre site on the northeast corner of Summit Boulevard and Jog Road includes pine woods, a sawgrass marsh, ponds, fields and hammock.

Davis said Pine Jog takes its land use seriously and imposed three conditions for the anticipated 970-student school: It must be environmentally themed, it must be built as a U.S. Green Building Council-certified building and Pine Jog must have a continued role in the curriculum, he said.

The school is the result of a partnership among the Palm Beach County School Board, FAU and Pine Jog. The district needed another school in the area, and Pine Jog needed to update its facility, Davis said.

The district will lease 10 of the site's 150 acres for 75 years from Pine Jog, and the district will build a 15,000-square foot facility in exchange.

With the school placed in the heart of the area, Durando worries that Summit Boulevard eventually will have to be expanded to accommodate extra traffic caused by drop-offs and pickups.

Improper planning resulted in the school being built on the Pine Jog site, she said. The situation could have been avoided if the school district had banked land for future schools 10 years ago, she said.

"I still have fears, and it's nothing against the need for schools," Durando said. "Pine Jog is one little instance of our lack of foresight."

Green buildings increase human productivity and promote health, and people working and going to school in such buildings could have fewer allergies and sick days, said Glenn Thomas, FAU's executive director for pre-K through 12th grade schools and programs.

The U.S. Green Building Council bestows the LEED certification to buildings with specific criteria, such as which materials are used, energy efficiency, water-bill savings and indoor environmental quality.

The cost to build a green school is about 3 percent to 5 percent more than to build a regular school of the same size, said Joseph Sanches, chief of facilities management for the school district. The school and Pine Jog facility will cost about \$30.4 million, he said.

Savings from the energy-efficient building will outweigh higher construction costs, Thomas said.

FAU wanted to create a better teaching and learning environment for graduate students and faculty at Pine Jog, he said.

"We have a mission to further environmental education," Thomas said.

Teachers at the school will present, not only a standard curriculum from an ecological perspective, but also hands-on lessons about the environment, he said.

Teachers and students at the school will have access to Pine Jog's facility for their lessons, Davis said.

"We worked out whatever problems we had, as far as they're building on the site, and of course we stay in touch with Pine Jog about our concerns as they come up," said Leah Schad, treasurer and former president of the Audubon Society of the Everglades.

Forum Publishing Group is a subsidiary of Sun-Sentinel Co. Kyara Lomer can be reached at [krlomer@tribune.com](mailto:krlomer@tribune.com) or 954-596-5646.

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