

CFM Distributors 1914 headquarters gets an energy makeover

The West Bottoms is home to CFM Distributors, an employee-owned distributor of sustainable heating, cooling and refrigeration systems operating in five cities, with its headquarters at 1104 Union Ave.

Those high-efficiency systems have been around for more than 20 years, said Tom Roberts, CFM president, but selling them is easier when the seller is “walking the talk.” In making sure that all of its own practices and systems are as sustainable as possible, CFM understands fully why people would and should buy and use them.

CFM’s 111,000-square-foot headquarters, built in 1914, was in need of an energy makeover that included high-efficiency lighting and a new, state-of-the-art heating and cooling system. A facility-wide maintenance system was installed, with Internet-based control for resetting temperatures to the minimum energy expenditure needed for each space. For example, a largely unoccupied warehouse area is maintained at only 38 degrees.

A 5,000-watt solar array on the roof provides most of the office area’s lighting. A collection of about 30 panels wired to an inverter is tied to the building system, which is tied into the electric grid, with surplus sold back to KCP&L. The roof’s ROI is 4 percent, with a projected payback of 11 or 12 years — and a demonstration value that is significantly higher.

Roberts dubs that sort of responsible, progressive thrift and care as “nifty,” a non-technical adjective that accurately conveys the thrill and satisfaction expressed by those involved.

Beyond CFM, Roberts is invested in greening the industry at large. As president of the Kansas City Industrial Council, he belongs to a coalition of business players promoting sustainable initiatives industry-wide. The council recently announced the creation of an award to



Tom Roberts, CEO of CFM Distributors, stands amid the 30 solar panels providing renewable energy to the company’s West Bottoms headquarters.

recognize an industrial community member's outstanding efforts in sustainability, which will be presented for the first time in February 2011.

In-house, CFM has implemented other green projects:

A pervious-paving parking lot which diverts storm water out of the system, and an off-grid photovoltaic system with battery storage to power its two large light fixtures supporting typical nighttime use, with a capacity to maintain it even with five consecutive days of cloudy weather.

A practice of converting inbound packaging cardboard into outbound packaging, with leftovers funneled to a neighborhood recycling bin set up on site, which is also available to CFM's industrial neighbors.

Recovering rainwater from the roof and directing it to a 7' x 80' strip of green space.

CFM helps clients look at the spectrum of options and a logical progression for investing in them, Roberts said. This experience teaches them and improves what they can tell clients about the potential ROI. The intangibles of employee morale, recruitment and customer satisfaction also carry weight.

In all aspects, CFM's intention is to help lead the way, as

sustainability has moved from a "fringe" conservation movement to a crucial concern in boardrooms, Roberts explained.

Homeowners also have opportunities now they are unlikely to ever have again for replacing heating and cooling systems that will give them energy independence, Roberts said. The confluence of factors — a slow economy, manufacturer rebates, utility rebates and tax credits — is unprecedented.

"We cannot believe what people are able to get for their money," he said, like state-of-the-art technology at prices from 10–15 years ago. "All the smart people are doing it."



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