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**TAKING THE LEED:** Betsy del Monte of The Beck Group, left, and green-building consultant Catherine Horsey, on site at Centennial Hall on the St. Mark's School of Texas campus in North Dallas. The Beck Group is overseeing sustainability efforts at Centennial Hall, which is pursuing LEED certification.

# RE industry readies for new green standards

BY BILL HETHCOCK | STAFF WRITER

North Texas architects, contractors and developers are gearing up for upgraded green-building standards that will be rolled out next year.

The U.S. Green Building Council in November changed its scoring system for buildings seeking certification under Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards, or LEED.

LEED establishes a point system for ecologically sensitive design and construction practices, such as water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and indoor environmental quality. The changes were made based on feedback the council has received in the eight years that LEED standards have been in effect, said Catherine Horsey, owner of a consulting company called Sustainable Places, Sustainable Organizations and co-chair of the Green Building Council's statewide advocacy committee.

One of the most significant changes involves the weighting of credits to more accurately reflect the energy efficiency of buildings and their impact on the environment and health of people who use them, Horsey said. Local groups of green-building professionals will establish priorities for each area so the program is more tailored to account for climate and other regional differences, she said.

The regional standards have not yet been set. They could, for example, give Texas buildings with solar panels or sun-reflecting roofs more LEED points than those features would get in less sunny locales, Horsey said.

The new standards, known as LEED 2009, will be phased in next year. Building own-

ers and developers who register for LEED certification before the end of the year can choose whether they want to seek certification under the old or new system.

The new rating system is based on a 100-point scale instead of a 57-point system, says Eugenia Robbins, president of RER Solutions, a Dallas-based company that helps corporate tenants and commercial real estate owners reach sustainability and efficiency goals.

"The credits are going to be worth more points when they're associated with more important building impacts, such as energy efficiency or reducing greenhouse gas emissions," she said.

Another change is the addition of "life-cycle analysis," said Betsy del Monte, director of sustainability for The Beck Group and past chairwoman of the Green Building Council's North Texas Chapter. That means, for example, that building owners will get points for installing natural stone floors instead of vinyl that needs to be replaced every few years and end up in landfills, del Monte said.

"(Under the revised standards) the things that you get (LEED) credit for are going to be things that truly add value to the building," del Monte said. "Building owners are going to see more of a benefit, because they'll see their building valuation and lease rates go up."

Rising values will accelerate the acceptance of green building standards, which will lead to more improvements to the LEED rating system, Robbins says.

"The goal for all of this is market transformation," she said. "There has been a tremendous acceptance of this process."