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Mr. Green Architect lands top award for eco-conscious efforts

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Kermit's got it all wrong when he says it's not easy being green. Just ask Christopher Simmonds.

The Ottawa architect is this year's winner of the Recognition Award from the Ottawa Region Chapter of the Canadian Green Building Council. The award was presented during a ceremony at the chapter's annual general meeting earlier this week.

Now in its third year, the award is given to the person who best represents the chapter's objective of fostering sustainable design, construction, and/or management of buildings in Eastern Ontario and Western Quebec.

The award isn't necessarily for a specific project, but rather for overall effort on the green building front.

Instead of a cash award, the winner becomes owner of one metre of the recreational Trans Canada Trail.

"What's really important about this award is that for the community as a whole, it shows a growing awareness of the capacity of the design and construction industry to create environmentally sustainable buildings," says Simmonds, who was among 240 people at Monday's awards ceremony.

Also nominated this year were Gatineau architect Isabelle Bradbury and Ottawa-based sustainable design expert Sheila Brown. Previous award winners include developer Jonathan Westeinde (2006) and sustainable design specialist Stephen Pope (2005).

A graduate of Carleton University's architecture program, the eco-conscious Simmonds has practised in Ottawa for 25 years. His firm Christopher Simmonds Architect Inc. designs public, commercial and residential buildings, as well as gardens.

His projects have ranged from the bold, energy-efficient Mountain Equipment Co-op store on Richmond Road to award-winning custom homes and co-op housing. He is also the architect on Eco-Cité, the mixed commercial/residential building on Bank Street in the Glebe that is the city's first major development to use ground source heat pumps for all heating and cooling needs.

But Erika Mayer, chair of the Recognition Award nominations committee, says it was the green architecture of the just-opened Rideau Valley Conservation Centre on Prince of Wales Drive that helped clinch the award.

"It will be a showcase for the region," Mayer says, pointing to such innovations as the building's capacity for treating its own waste water. "This will touch a lot of people and educate the public about green building."

The centre's environmental sustainability is expected to net it a silver and possibly even a gold rating under the rigorous Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification program.

That program was brought to Canada by the Canada Green Building Council, which was established in 2002.

The Canadian version of the program applies only to commercial and other major buildings. LEED certification for individual homes currently piggybacks on the United States program, but the council hopes to have a Canadian program in place by early 2009.

Patrick Langston is an Ottawa writer.

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