

## The Integrator's Voice

### Washington firm helps city dwellers save some green

By Leslie Stevens

Although there was once a mere scattering of green buildings across the country, eco-friendliness is now rapidly expanding into multi-dwelling units (MDUs). As these communities have the ability to house 6,000 homes within a city block, energy costs are an enormous concern for builders.

Rick Strauss, of The Music Room, a division of Protection & Communications Inc., has been successful in integrating lighting and shade control to facilitate green within MDUs while also adding to the aesthetics of the home and enhancing customers' lifestyles.

**Q.** How have your lighting control solutions contributed to a green home, specifically in an MDU environment?

**A.** All of our Lutron lighting control solutions offer green options for builders of single-family homes and MDUs. In general, dimming electric light saves energy and extends lamp life. By simply dimming incandescent lights to 50 percent light level, one will gain 40 percent energy savings. Additionally, if lights are dimmed to a 50 percent light level, then those lamps will last 20 times longer than normal—increasing savings in both energy and replacement costs.

**Q.** What features in your shade control solutions facilitate eco-friendliness?

**A.** First, we use daylight harvesting whenever possible, as it can easily be achieved with a shading control system. Daylight harvesting is adjusting shades and lighting based on the amount of light desired in the space at a certain time of day. Natural light is a free, eco-friendly and efficient way to light a home.

Second, many fabrics for roller shades are green, meaning that they are made of materials that do not give off gas chemicals into the home. Many roller fabrics have chemicals like PVC, which tend to "off-gas," or slowly let out chemicals in a gaseous form over time. Today there are newer fabrics on the market that do not have this effect and are thus considered eco-friendly.

Third, and perhaps most important, shading control systems really help reduce heating and cooling costs. MDU units tend to have entire walls made of glass.

Uncontrolled, the sun drenches the unit with heat and forces the homeowner to rely on air conditioning systems to cool the space. In the winter, shading systems help insulate the home by trapping much of the heat generated inside the home.

**Q.** What elements in your lighting and shade control solutions contribute to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design)?

**A.** Both lighting control and shading play a part in gaining points toward LEED certification. By using Lutron lighting and shade control, developers can commonly accrue the majority of points needed for their buildings to gain LEED certification.

**Q.** What costs does the builder typically incur when deciding to go with your lighting and shade control solutions?

**A.** It really depends on the person making the decision, whether it's the end user, developer or architect. Generally, I advise developers to start small, with a basic system that allows them to tout the project as green but does not require a huge capital investment. These solutions can cost as little as \$250 per unit if a builder installs dimmers on five to 10 of the most frequently used lights. However, if the homeowner is making the decision for lighting control, it is not uncommon to spend \$10,000 or more on a lighting and shading control system. Builders and developers can gain insight into pricing for lighting control solutions by calling lighting control manufacturers or their security and technology provider.

**Q.** How does the builder and/or developer recoup these costs?

**A.** First, the builder realizes faster turns on their inventory by marketing the convenience, safety, ambiance and green benefits of a lighting and shading system. Lighting control manufacturers commonly have some type of marketing program that allows builders to easily



### Spotlight on: Rick Strauss

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broadcast this message. Also, security and technology providers, such as ourselves, assist the developer with their sales center.

Second, the builder adds lighting controls into their options mix. I have been involved with several MDU projects that allowed the developer to realize incremental profits from option sales on lighting and shade control systems.

**Q.** Will expenses increase or decrease for a homebuyer in the short term and long term?

**A.** Yes and yes. Lighting and shade control will definitely decrease expenses for the homebuyer in the short and long run. Energy savings and lamp-life extension are critical benefits that start from the first second the homebuyer uses the system. The only cost incurred is the initial price of the system. However, an investment in lighting and shading control should be viewed as one that increases the value of the home, allows for dramatic energy savings, and protects carpets and furnishings from harmful UV rays. If the homebuyer is planning on staying in the home for a few years or more, it is definitely a wise investment.

**Q.** What can a builder and/or developer do to leverage lighting and shade control?

**A.** Through a simple investment in wiring, a builder/developer can

market all the benefits of a lighting and shading control system. It also is crucial that the builder operates or has access to a suitable showroom environment that properly demonstrates lighting control. Lighting and shading control is an abstract concept, and it is difficult for homeowners to really grasp its full power. Only when end users interact with a lighting and shading control system will they truly begin to understand its true value.

**Q.** How do your lighting and shade control solutions improve the marketability of an MDU?

**A.** Lighting and shade control is one of the only home products that increases end-user satisfaction, saves energy, makes the home safer, looks better and is tech-savvy. These are relevant, powerful benefits that the developer can market to expedite the sales of their units.

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