

Environmentally Friendly Clinton Library Builds 'Green' Roof

By Andrew DeMillo
The Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK -- Bill Clinton likes to brag about his presidential library and museum being a "green" building. Soon, he'll have a green roof to go with it.

Over the past two weeks, workers have been using a crane to hoist 90 species of plants and more than four truckloads of soil atop the former president's library and museum to transform what had been a plain looking roof into a garden surrounding Clinton's penthouse apartment.

Instead of an expanse of concrete, the glass and steel structure will be topped by the end of this month with, among other things, strawberries, ferns, switch grass and roses.

"This is just an area he can come in, relax in and just enjoy the view," Clinton Foundation Facilities and Operations Director Debbie Shock said in an interview on the roof on a recent afternoon.

The changes may look pretty, but they're not only for aesthetics. The roof is capturing rainwater that would normally run off onto the soil and a hidden irrigation system cuts down on the amount of water that would be used on sprinklers.

It represents what Clinton -- who has used his nonprofit foundation to promote sustainable development and environmentally friendly building practices -- would like to see in buildings nationwide.

Clinton recently announced a program through his foundation aimed at helping homeowners and commercial building owners modernize their buildings to reduce energy use. The scene surrounding his private residence at the library provides a glimpse of what that may entail.

"When President Clinton built his library here, part of what he wanted was something that would serve as an example to others, both in design and architecture, but also in sustainability and its footprint and its coexistence with the city landscape," Clinton Foundation spokesman Jordan Johnson said. "The purpose was to walk the walk and talk the talk."

The \$165 million library complex already had plenty to tout in terms of ecological features. The library, the first presidential library to earn an award from the U.S. Green Committee for environmental design, includes floors made from recycled rubber tires. Solar panels sit on another portion of the roof, and the parking lot features bicycle racks and charging stations for electric cars.

When it opened in 2004, the library earned a "silver" rating under the Leadership Energy Environmental Design, the benchmark for environmentally friendly buildings. Last week, it earned a "platinum" certification for ongoing works on existing buildings.

On a recent afternoon, Shock and other foundation workers pointed out the benefit of replacing a traditional flat roof with a garden with a depth ranging from 3 inches to 9 inches.

"All of a sudden, instead of having a roof that water continually runs off of, now you've got a rain mat underneath here that will actually irrigate these plants. It actually becomes a control for your stormwater runoff," Shock said. "It's not only for enjoyment, but it's got a lot to do with the environment and how we control our stormwater runoff."

And if additional water is needed for the plants, the library will rely on an underground irrigation system using 90 percent less water than traditional sprinklers or hoses would use.

"There will never be any sprinklers up here," said Bruce Hayes, president of Sustainable Engineering Solutions, an Oregon-based firm that is installing the irrigation system. "It just comes up from the ground."

Shock said the garden won't become a virtual jungle, but will be maintained in an eco-friendly manner. That means no gas-powered lawnmowers or machines, and no chemicals.

"We're not using any pesticides. All of our fertilizers are organic," Shock said.

The gardening team also added a sentimental touch by planting the favorite flower of his mom, the late Virginia Kelley.

"His mom loved yellow roses, and he always gave her yellow roses for any holidays so we're giving back to him some yellow roses," Shock said.

Though most of the changes will be invisible to library visitors -- the garden and Clinton's private apartment are closed to the public -- Shock said she hopes to add exhibits detailing the roof's features and how they help the environment.

The rooftop garden will feature some herbs and vegetables, and Shock hopes to share the bounty with library visitors -- if not its sole resident.

"When the president's here, we'd love to have him throw in some green onions or some scallion in his scrambled eggs," Shock said. "But we're also hoping we can pick some and take it down to the cafe and let them use it and let our visitors experience a little bit from our green roof."

