

Pozzotive progress

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Concrete block and masonry products do not leap to mind when considering green business materials, but at Kingston Block and Masonry Supply L.L.C., they are changing that stereotype into a new paradigm.

The Ulster County Business of the Year, Kingston Block and Masonry Supply manufactures a sustainable line of concrete products that uses Pozzotive, a patented process to create top quality concrete using recycled materials, including post-consumer glass and recycled aggregates from throughout the Northeast. And the lead inventor says it can be a far reaching product.

"Overall, this industry is stuck in 1968," said Louis P. Grasso Jr., managing partner of the company. "There is so much room for improvement. Masonry hasn't kept up with sustainability and the green movement."

Grasso credits architect Robert D. Fox, a leader in green-building, for inspiring him to invent a new concrete masonry block and brick product when they met at a conference a decade ago. "He said, figure out a way to contribute to sustainability and green building," said Grasso. "Needless to say, I took it as a challenge."

The result is Pozzotive, a patented post consumer supplementary cementitious material (SCM) Grasso invented with help from industry and scientific partners that is an environmentally improved product not only because it uses post consumer recycled glass and aggregates but because it requires only about one-tenth of the BTUs to manufacture, thus saving energy and reducing pollutants from production.

"What is the bigger picture?" asks Grasso rhetorically. "The effect on the broader ecology and the economy. I consider myself an environmentalist. But I am also an industrialist. I look at this product as a second chance to get it right. We can have a Renaissance in the construction industry."

"Kingston Block is a true innovator," said Fox. "A product like Pozzotive that turns waste into a valuable material is a remarkable thing."

Though Pozzotive is made in Kingston, Grasso is active throughout the Hudson Valley and New York state. He is a member of the board of directors of the Bronx Chamber of Commerce, is currently the vice chairman of the state Concrete Masonry Association and will be chairman of the association in 2011.

Grasso said that in his chairman's role, and using the success of his Pozzotive products, he will seek to convince the industry that adopting green production practices will provide economic return as well as environmental benefits. "Take us as an example of how you can change something, a product that was the Rodney Dangerfield of the construction industry," Grasso said. "This business suffered greatly due to economic downturn for sure. But if we didn't focus on sustainability, perhaps we would not be in business at all anymore."

After eight years of development, Pozzotive was granted a patent in 2008 and since then, he said he or company associates have met with more than 1,500 architects and engineers. The product and the publicity are paying off. In the storage yard of the manufacturing facility in Kingston, Grasso moves among the neat piles of concrete blocks fashioned with Pozzotive and stored on pallets ready for shipping, to an array of projects throughout New York City.

"It has been an enormous struggle for us in this economy, but now, we're doing well. We have a future," said Grasso. "The light at the end of the tunnel is getting brighter every day, and we hope we can be used by other businesses to look at and model their business after."