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FGBC Member Jonathan Burgess Rises to President of Spinnaker Group

Florida Green Building Coalition (FGBC) member Jonathan Burgess could have stayed in Rhode Island, where everybody already understood what it meant to build green. Instead, he moved to West Palm Beach in 2006 and got in on the ground floor of Florida's green building movement.

"I chose a place where the conversation was just starting out," he said. "I felt empowered to be a change agent when everything was just starting to take hold."

Last November Burgess bought The Spinnaker Group, one of South Florida's leading sustainability consultants, and became president of the company he'd worked for since 2012.

The Spinnaker Group shepherds builders through a process that meets their particular green-building goals, whether it be energy-efficiency, healthy living or curbing environmental impact. In the U.S. there are an overwhelming 100 different green building certifications.

"We're seeing confusion in the market as more programs become available," Burgess said. "We master them, and we become the subject matter experts that the professionals turn to."

The Florida Green Building Coalition's certifications offer valuable guidance, because their standards focus on what works in this state.

"It's hard to get people who are building a house in Maine to understand why insulation is less important to a house in Miami, and the heat gain coefficient on the windows is more important."

A native of coastal Maine, Burgess began his career in Rhode Island as a landscape architect. In the rural Northeast, beautiful natural venues were common. When he moved to West Palm Beach Florida, he was confronted with urban sprawl and strip malls.

During his work in Rhode Island, he had seen how landscape architecture and green building could drive communities towards sustainable growth. When he came to Florida, he decided early on to only pursue projects that made him feel proud.

The journey led Burgess to become a LEED accredited professional. Several years later he was working as a consultant for Spinakker, when the company hired him and tasked him with the project's completion. Since then, Burgess has worked on numerous green building projects, from K-12 schools to university campuses to high-rise residential towers to retail centers and government buildings. Through it all, Spinnaker and Burgess have remained at the front end of the green conversation

“There's a business case for green building as much as there is an environmental impact benefit,” he said. “There's overwhelming data that show investments in energy and water systems can add value to a neighborhood and to your bottom line.”