

What is growing up on the roof?

JOHN LAMB *The Forum* •

Metro/State - 05/23/2008

The forecast for this Memorial Day weekend includes rain, which may keep some area green thumbs from getting out in their gardens. This spring's unpredictable weather hasn't stopped one particular high-profile landscaping project. But instead of digging in the dirt, the workers at 102 Broadway have been lifting dirt up to the roof. The Kilbourne Group project, formerly home to Strauss and NavTeq, is the latest area building to add a green roof. The existing roof has been built up 6½ inches with layers of rubber membrane, insulation and 4 inches of soil, or rather a specialized "planting medium." Kilbourne Group Project Manager Mike Allmendinger said the surface

will soon be planted with grasses indigenous to this area. Such green roofs bring an aesthetic aspect to a property, but also serve as insulation, help with water drainage and can double the life by protecting the roof from elements. They can also double the cost of a more standard roof. Still, they fit nicely into certain developers' ideals.

"The motivation for this is that the Kilbourne Group wants to bring innovative, sustainable ideas to the projects we're working on," said Allmendinger, a landscape architect whose company, Land Elements, is designing this project. While the idea may still be innovative for Fargo, using natural toppings for urban structures is an established national trend, said Nicole Crutchfield, planner and landscape architect for the city of Fargo. She points to Chicago as paving the way for green roofs on city buildings. (Here's a neat note: Beehives on top of Chicago's City Hall produce more than 150 pounds of honey every year.) Karen Burgum, proprietor of the Hotel Donaldson, has a similarly sweet analogy for her building's verde vertex. "It's like a cherry on top of a sundae," she said. "It's a

nice topping. It adds something beautiful to the building." The Hotel Donaldson's roof, featuring plants and grass designed to mimic the Red River Valley, opened to guests when the hotel opened in fall 2003. The following summer, the rooftop bar Sky Prairie was opened to the public on weeknights. Burgum said the top-floor view, which overlooks 102 Broadway, allows a different perspective on the cityscape. "We don't have a lot of opportunity in the flat Red River Valley to get off the ground to take a look around," she said. "Plus, you get to put your feet in the grass to boot." Allmendinger, who also designed the HoDo roof, said the roof at 102 will be open to tenants of the second floor offices. And despite rumors, he said there is no local celebrity steakhouse going in on the main floor. Another green roof,

featuring plants and a tree, can be found above the garage at 12 Broadway. The new Fargo Public Library will feature green rooflets, covering the main entrances on the northwest and northeast corners. Allmendinger said another Kilbourne Group project, 300 Broadway, wants a green roof for its residential units. Of course, this means he's now looking for a variety of grass that is resistant to doggy doo for the pet-friendly building. Readers can reach Forum columnist John Lamb at (701) 241-5533 or jlamb@forumcomm.com