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and project designer/facilitator. “And he wanted the home to be a demonstration of green living, useable for visitors and future residents of all physical capability levels. In other words: He wanted a home for himself, but he also wanted to show the world a better way and leave something for others to continue to benefit from. All of that was inspiring to me and in line with my own goals. I instantly agreed.”

THE TEAM

Zahniser began by assembling the best professionals he could find from both his regional and international green-building networks. “We now have one of the most extraordinary design teams ever assembled, and a lot of that comes down to how inspiring Ron’s original vision was,” said Zahniser. Through word-of-mouth about this vision among generous experts in the field, the heft of the volunteer team came together: Project Manager Jennifer Sheffield, LEED AP; Lead Builder Jesse Pellman, LEED AP; and Architect Carol Hickey, RA, American Institute of Architects Associate.

A host of other essential team members also joined—direct care staff members from Sheetz Landscaping Inc.; Rambo and Co.; a fundraising and land donation associate; landscape architects from Andropogon Associates Ltd.; a soil- and water-quality scientist from B.F. Environmental Consultants/Keystone Clearwater Solutions; and a structural engineer from Built Form LLC.

Sheffield, LEED AP, said, “Representing GBWAWA, a sustainable design firm in Tel Aviv, Israel, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, I attended a green conference in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in May 2017 and heard [Zahniser] speak about Ramboland. I was fascinated by the advanced social and economic aspects complementing the environmental goals, integrated in ways that I hadn’t seen before.” And this novel idea pulled her right in to the project management position.

Pellman, LEED, AP, said, “I got a call one day about a project that needed a builder, and as soon as the concept was explained, I was on board. It’s such a pioneering house and aligns tightly with the goals of our company (Longview Structures). It was a no-brainer.”

Hickey, the owner and principal of Hickey Architects, said, “Max Zahniser (whom I met through a friend of his mother several years ago) asked me if I’d be interested in participating. I’ve known Ron’s caregiver, Lou, for years, and I see Lou and Ron in town frequently. I was honored to be asked to be the project architect.”

THE FIRST STAGES

At print, the project site—a 1,100-square-foot home on a 10,000-square-foot site—had completed the design-development stage and was entering the construction-document phase. The project plan is 10 years in the making and represents a decade of brainstorming the team has enjoyed. When asked about their favorite stage of the project thus far, many team members attribute their fondness to this stage. “Early design was fun, when we often had our whole team in the room,



Rendering of Ramboland exterior



Rendering of Ramboland kitchen

swimming in all the possibilities,” said Zahniser, adding, “But that energy has continued as we’ve managed to progress into additional detailing and other design phases.”

“The upfront work, while sometimes tedious and laborious, has been rewarding. It’s truly collaborative, giving voice to all stakeholders and exploring myriad options to make sure that the end product is fully realized and resilient,” said Pellman.

Hickey said, “I really enjoyed the first couple charrettes, where a group of about 10 or 12 of us met up. We included folks on the West Coast via Skype and were able to interact in a productive way (with some disagreements, of course). Ron was present for these sessions and offered his opinions.”

However, each added they are certain the final will be their favorite stage. Zahniser said, "I think my favorite phase will be when Ron is first living in the house after we finally get it built, experiencing a lifestyle he's never been able to previously and watching all the doors that having built the house opens."

THE REVOLUTION

The project has six main goals that, at this time, have only been achieved by a couple of modern buildings in the world:

1. *Universal access*—The home will be accessible to specially abled people across the full spectrum of special needs.
2. *Energy grid independence*—The home will produce eight times as much energy as it uses, eliminating utility bills and creating income through the sale of excess power.
3. *Water grid independence*—Heal hydrology will eliminate the need for municipal water or sewer systems through rainwater collection, wastewater treatment and stormwater solutions.
4. *Food grid independence*—Healing living systems, such as a backyard garden and aquaponics system (connected to the on-site water grid) will produce a substantial abundance of food, creating income through the sale of excess food.
5. *Neighborhood ecological restoration*—Benefits of the water and food grids will be extended throughout the neighborhood.
6. *LEED Platinum and Living Building Challenge certifications*—The project will exceed the highest green building standards in the world through acting as a living laboratory that heals the ecosystem as it supports citizens with special needs through a cheaper method than has ever before existed.

At this time, approval tests (for the water, food and energy grid systems) are still being run on-site. Once the team breaks ground on the project, "the construction process itself should go fairly rapidly," said Zahniser. Completion of Ramboland is projected to take place sometime between spring and fall 2019, with the completion date hinging on how much product and financial support the team receives, or rather, how quickly they receive it.

THE AWARD

After the death of Malcomb Lewis, Ph.D., board member and green building leader, the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) created the Malcomb Lewis IMPACT! Award. Lewis was the founder

of Constructive Technologies Group, served on the EBN Innovation Network's advisory board, and chaired the USGBC Technical and Scientific Committee, where he helped make important decisions related to LEED Certification. According to USGBC Senior Vice President Kimberly Lewis, "People have been at the heart of USGBC's work since the beginning, and it is that passion and dedication that continues to fuel the green building movement. The Malcolm Lewis IMPACT! Award is meant to honor a team of volunteers who are making green buildings and communities a reality for their neighbors, family, friends, coworkers and greater community."

According to the USGBC website, nominations for the award must come in the form of a slideshow, infographic or video and are shared on USGBC's website and social media pages. The award criteria are:

- Must feature teams of three or more volunteers
- Must be tied to green building and align with USGBC's mission
- Must include at least one volunteer who is a USGBC representative or staff member

During the month of September, the public and nominees may vote via an article poll. Forty-four teams have been awarded since 2012, and winners are formally recognized during the annual Greenbuild leadership luncheon. "Ramboland is special because it really creates a new perspective for considering how communities can be better designed to support people with any level of mobility," said Lewis. "It shows how green building strategies provide benefits for the environment and help improve quality of life. This home, in a smaller community, is an exploration into regenerative development," he said. "It's a living laboratory that teaches us how cities and communities



Regenerative-living community design

can heal our ecosystems while supporting the lifestyles of people with disabilities in a more effective way.”

On receiving the award, Zahniser said, “It felt really good for the project to be recognized for how special it is and the amazing amount of donated wisdom, intellect, expertise, time and energy has gone into it. USGBC members actually nominated us, but the decision came down to voting. We admire the project teams we were up against; they were all deserving of winning. And we found out that a couple of those teams were also voting for Ramboland, which was definitely a boost.”

THE FUTURE

While the team began with high aspirations for the project itself, their hopes for the implications of the finished product are even higher. These are the kind of ideals that win nominations yet go beyond tangible awards. “A project like this one models the possibilities of how good residential housing can—and should—be,” said Pellman.

Taking it a step further, Sheffield added, “I hope that Ramboland is seen as a viable model for addressing the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) at the local level. The goals relate to the global challenges of poverty, inequality, climate and more.”

According to Zahniser, “There are so many preconceptions, habits and assumptions about the cost of inclusive and green design,

A FURTHER LOOK

- For more details on the project, visit ramboland.com.
- To get more information about the IMPACT! Awards and LEED certifications, visit usgbc.org.
- For more on the Greenbuild International Conference and Expo, visit greenbuild.usgbc.org.
- To read an in-depth Q&A with the Ramboland team, visit constructionbusinessowner.com/green-building-pioneers-take-accessibility-independence.

and these default mindsets contaminate and woefully limit most projects. I want everyone to have something to point to when all those preconceptions were not present, and a team of highly qualified, creative people came together to optimize systems; leverage what it has proved; and hopefully change all projects we work on thereafter.”

In Rambo’s own words: “I want to leave a legacy.” And that’s exactly what his team intends to help him do. **CBO**

Rachel Fulford is associate editor at Construction Business Owner magazine.

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RAMBOLAND: THE REGENERATIVE-LIVING LABORATORY THAT'S AIMED AT CHANGING THE WORLD

“Imagine if we could spend half as many tax dollars per citizen with special needs but be radically more effective in supporting their well-being and happiness, as well as the health of our cities. This project points the way.” These are the words that greet visitors on the official Ramboland building project’s website.

Any project with a name like Ramboland is bound to garner some intrigue. (Cue images of Stallone-style guerilla warfare.) But the name is the least intriguing thing about Ramboland. Despite the project’s small stature in comparison with other construction projects of the same scope, the Ramboland team members have inspirationally high goals and one coveted award already under their tool belts. And it all started with one man—Ron Rambo.

THE VISIONARY

Ron Rambo, 57, was born with cerebral palsy. His central goal is to be a pioneer, helping the millions of others in the United States and around the world, who face the same, or similar, difficulties. According to the

Ramboland website, the rate of persons with disabilities for ages 18 to 64 in the U.S. is 10.5 percent, and roughly 4.5 million Americans rely on a wheelchair for mobility daily.

According to the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA), existing residential dwelling units are not required to comply with accessibility laws set forth by the ADA or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. As such, for those whom these laws generally protect, finding accessible housing is difficult, as landlords of existing housing must be willing and able to fund the necessary additions that make it accessible for those with special needs—an expensive undertaking.

And, in 2013, almost 30 percent of working-age U.S. civilians with disabilities were living in poverty—more than double the national rate, according to ramboland.com. Consequently, these individuals, Rambo included, are forced to live in conditions that make the tasks most of us take for granted—such as navigating from room to room, cooking a meal, showering or simply entering the home—nightmarish feats to complete. But, in true Rambo fashion, he found a solution.

Other than allocating a government-run and funded home-ownership program, the only way to help to fix the problems of basic living that both he and his peers face was to first build a model home specially designed for him and for those with special needs. Of course, he couldn’t do this alone. To get started, Rambo immediately reached out to Praxis Building Solutions LLC Owner and Chief Executive Officer and Sustainability Nexus Co-founder and Executive Director Max Zahniser.

“Ron contacted me through a mutual acquaintance in the Lancaster, Pennsylvania, area. His mother had offered him a property for developing a home if he could find someone to design it for him,” said Zahniser, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Fellow



Ron Rambo (front center) and Ramboland team members