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Omega Celebrates Earth Day by Planting Wetland for America's First Living Building

*Omega staff spend Earth Day outdoors planting wastewater treatment
wetland for the new Omega Center for Sustainable Living*

RHINEBECK, NY – Omega Institute is on its way to completing the construction of the award-winning Omega Center for Sustainable Living (OCSL), which will be the nation's first Living Building, meeting the highest standards in green building. Omega has invited its entire 185-person staff out of the office on Earth Day, April 22, 2009, to help plant 8,000 plants. The plants will become part of the OCSL's constructed wetland—a critical component to the building, which will serve as a natural wastewater treatment facility and environmental education center.

“We are thrilled to be celebrating Earth Day, a day dedicated to raising environmental awareness, by planting living seeds for our landmark education center. Once completed, we hope that the OCSL will be here to raise that same type of awareness each and every day,” said Skip Backus, executive director at Omega. “At Omega, we believe that nature can teach us how to solve the environmental crisis if we listen carefully enough. By combining the Earth's wisdom with cutting-edge human technology, the Omega Center for Sustainable Living will demonstrate what is possible—and point us toward how we can reinvent the way we live.”

The core of the center is a 4,500-square-foot greenhouse containing a water filtration system called the Eco Machine™. This living system will use plants, bacteria, algae, snails, and fungi to recycle Omega's wastewater (approximately 5 million gallons per year) into clean water that will restore the aquifer under Omega's property. John Todd, winner of the 2008 Buckminster Fuller Challenge award, and his son Jonathan, are the founders of John Todd Ecological Design, Inc., which is responsible for the design of the Eco Machine™. Jonathan will join the Omega staff in the Earth Day planting.

“The constructed wetlands are planted with over 8,000 native plants. While the plants add a beautiful value to the landscape, their roots below the surface support a robust habitat within the gravel for beneficial bacteria to treat wastewater to high standards. Native plant species include mostly cattails and two types of bulrush, but also many flowering wetland plants and shrubs,” Jonathan said.

The OCSL is slated to be the first green building to achieve both LEED® Platinum and Living Building Challenge™ Certification. In addition to being self-sustaining in terms

of water and energy usage, the OCSL will raise the bar in green building by using the best and most comprehensive sustainable building practices available today. The cutting-edge technology of the OCSL brings together wastewater recycling, clean energy, green architecture, and other sustainability elements that can be replicated locally and globally. The center will also include a classroom and laboratory for educational programs.

At the Greenbuild 2007 conference the OCSL was the sole winner of the Living Building Challenge™ “On the Boards Award” for a building in the design process which achieves the highest level of environmental performance. The OCSL was also a topic of panel discussion at the Greenbuild 2008 conference.

A \$2.8 million capital campaign is underway to fund the creation of the OCSL. Omega has already received \$100,000 from the Dutchess County Industrial Development Authority, among generous donations from others. Omega is seeking \$1.7 million to its goal.

For more information about the Omega Center for Sustainable Living, please visit eOmega.org/ocsl.

About Omega Institute for Holistic Studies

Founded in 1977, Omega Institute for Holistic Studies is the nation's most trusted source for wellness and personal growth. As a nonprofit organization, Omega offers diverse and innovative educational experiences that inspire an integrated approach to personal and social change. Located on 195 acres in the beautiful Hudson Valley, Omega welcomes more than 23,000 people to its workshops, conferences, and retreats in Rhinebeck, New York and at exceptional locations around the world. eOmega.org

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