Living life today like you will be here tomorrow is the mantra of seniors Erick Elgin, Mora, Minn., and Christopher Waltz, Chisago Lakes, Minn. These natural resource majors and roommates care deeply about the environment and about the future of the campus and our world.

Elgin and Waltz led an effort that resulted in the new residence hall, currently under construction, to be certified under the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). This certification verifies that a building project meets the highest green building and performance measures.

“We can’t just accept the status quo,” Waltz says. “Erick and I were already passionate about the environment so working for the LEED certification fit both our belief system and our desire to make a difference.”

Elgin echoes the sentiment. “Chris and I believe in sustainability efforts and have worked hard to persuade others that this initiative is important,” he explains. “The LEED certification is not our end goal; however, it is a step in the way toward our ultimate goal of sustainability. I believe that we can change the world if we can persuade others how important this is.”

The two have worked tirelessly, sometimes at the expense of other priorities, to convince students and administrators about the significance of sustainability. “We visited numerous clubs and organizations on campus to present our case and had countless one-on-one conversations in order to make this happen,” Elgin continues. “We needed people to understand that the issue was serious, and that we were serious.”

As the student representative to the Board of Regents, Elgin was able to keep...
LEED certification on the minds of those he worked with on the facilities committee as well as mention it to Vice President for University Services Kathleen O’Brien when they had an opportunity to talk. “We wanted to remind people as often as we could, whenever we could,” he says.

After discovering an interest in natural resources, Waltz came to Crookston after a year and a half at a junior college because he “liked the size of the campus,” and Elgin transferred from the U of M, Duluth specifically for the major.

Both students respect the skill and passion of Dan Svedarsky, Ph.D., professor and head of the Natural Resources Department. “Dr. Svedarsky always seems to have time for students even though he has a plate filled with responsibilities,” Elgin reflects. “He is a great role model and provides outstanding leadership in the field.”

Leaders in their own right, Elgin and Waltz know what can happen when there is a zeal for living today like you will be here tomorrow. Thanks to Elgin and Waltz, the Crookston campus is on its way.

University of Minnesota President Robert Bruninks was the first Big Ten signatory of the American College & University Presidents Climate Commitment (ACUPCC). In his 2008 State of the University address, Bruninks said, “This is a highly visible commitment that demonstrates strong alignment between student concerns and our institutional values.”

According to the ACUPCC Web site, this commitment “is a high-visibility effort to address global warming by garnering institutional commitments to neutralize greenhouse gas emissions, and to accelerate the research and educational efforts of higher education to equip society to re-stabilize the earth’s climate.

“Building on the growing momentum for leadership and action on climate change, the Presidents Climate Commitment provides a framework and support for America’s colleges and universities to go climate neutral. It recognizes the unique role of presidents and chancellors in providing leadership and guidance in their institutions and to society.”

(For more, visit www.presidentsclimatecommitment.org.)