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BUSINESSES FIND THAT IT'S EASY BEING GREEN

ENVIRONMENT

BUSINESS OWNERS ARE LOOKING OUT FOR THEIR EMPLOYEES AND THE NATURAL WORLD BY USING RECYCLED MATERIALS AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

By: Tonya Strickland

FOR AN INCREASING NUMBER of local companies, going green means far more than installing solar panels and recycling office supplies. They're building with denim insulation instead of fiberglass, installing cork floors instead of hardwood ones and using carpet that features recycled content.

"It's like the tipping point has arrived in the trend of being green," said Erik Justesen, chairman of the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce's sustainability committee and chief executive officer of RRM Design Group.

The emerging countywide trend has been fueled in part by green products that are more available and more affordable.

But SLO Green Build, an organization that promotes environmentally friendly building practices, has also played a role.

The local nonprofit group, composed of architects, builders, planners and residents, recently reached an understanding with all city councils in the county as well as the county Board of Supervisors to advocate commercial and residential green building.

They meet quarterly to exchange information, identify key issues, organize free sustainability presentations and brainstorm future policies for energy conservation and green building incentives. "Across the board, folks who might not traditionally align are aligning in green building," said Andrea Pease, an executive committee member of SLO Green Build and owner of Built it Green Consulting in San Luis Obispo.

A poll of San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce members supports that. Eighty percent of those asked to gauge the importance of energy conservation and sustainability in their businesses called such issues important and said they want to learn more about them.

"Building green doesn't have to be unusual, odd or inordinately expensive," said Mike Hicks, president of Southern Exposure Construction Inc. in San Luis Obispo.

Some companies have even linked sustainable practices to higher productivity and reduced employee absenteeism.

Here's a look at a few businesses that have demonstrated green thinking.

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HABITAT STUDIO, SAN LUIS OBISPO

As owner Marilyn Farmer renovates a 1,100-square-foot bungalow on Marsh Street, she has installed recycled-content carpet lacking volatile organic compounds and built cabinets with sustainable plywood using nonformaldehyde glue.

Her focus was sustainable design and employee health.

"It certainly makes sense to consider those factors when you're creating a space," Farmer said. "It does not make sense to fill a building with toxins."

Some glues used to assemble interiors release gas contaminants years after they dry, she said, which can make people sick.

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BAMBU BATU, GROVER BEACH

Bambu Batu owner Fred Hornaday hasn't changed his lightbulbs in a year and a half. That's because he uses the energy-saving fluorescent kind to light his small retail space in Grover Beach.

"You don't have to be a huge business to make a big difference," he said.

The compact bulbs, which are more efficient, last up to seven years, according to the product's packaging.

Bulbs that are qualified by Energy Star, a U.S. program to promote energy-efficient consumer products, use about 75 percent less energy than standard incandescent bulbs and last up to 10 times longer, as stated on www.energy star.gov.

This works out to \$30 or more in electricity savings over each bulb's lifetime.

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HOW YOUR BUSINESS CAN GO GREEN

- * Install high-efficiency lights and energy-efficient appliances;
- * Use recycled-content products and salvaged and engineered lumber to reduce the need for new products;
- * Allow natural light and plenty of fresh air to reduce the need for electric lighting and cooling;
- * Use natural materials, such as straw and earth, for insulation, mass and structural loads;
- * Use no-or low-VOC (volatile organic compound) paints, formaldehyde-free products and other low-impact materials;

* Promote pedestrian, bike and bus transportation instead of car travel.

MORE ONLINE

For more information, visit www.slogreenbuild.org.

-- COURTESY OF SLO GREEN BUILD

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SAVVI SKIN AND BODY STUDIO, SAN LUIS OBISPO

When owner Julie Platzer recently transformed an open space in her salon into three massage rooms, she opted to insulate the walls with shredded recycled denim instead of fiberglass. She also selected soundboard and cotton fabric overlay instead of drywall and paint.

"We just did it completely different," she said. "The denim is a way to incorporate green building because it's recycled and it's not a synthetic chemical."

Platzer says she spent about \$240 on the three rolls of denim purchased locally-- 30 percent to 35 percent more expensive than fiberglass--but that it was worth it because the organic material is superior in insulating for sound and heat.

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MINDBODY ONLINE, SAN LUIS OBISPO

When deciding to go green, **MINDBODY Online** chief executive officer Rick Stollmeyer considered the firm's office and its occupants.

Some of the tenant improvements to the Broad Street site include cork flooring, recycled-content office accents, natural ventilation and water conservation.

"We wanted our employees' time at work to be enjoyable," he said.

As a result, his staff is more efficient because mood is up while absenteeism is down in the last year, Stollmeyer added.

Low-flow toilet, urinal and faucet fixtures use 45 percent less water -- or 20,000 fewer gallons a year -- and result in \$381 in annual savings, said Mike Hicks, president of Southern Exposure Construction Inc., the firm's contractor.

In 2006, **MINDBODY** operated in a space half the size of its current one with half the staff.

Stollmeyer uses a fourth of the energy per square foot as in the previous location.

One reason is the 2,100 square feet of cork flooring, he said. It keeps the office, which operates on a second story, at a stable temperature -- blocking any heat rising from below.

It also insulates sound and because the material is peeled cork oak tree bark, assembling it doesn't require a tree to be cut as with hardwood floors, Hicks added.

The firm's reception counter is made from scraps of 60 percent postindustrial aluminum molded together in a sheet surface.

Stollmeyer said the material used less energy to produce than other traditional plastic laminate tops.

- (1) TRIBUNE PHOTOS BY JOE JOHNSTON - Julie Platzer of Savvi Skin & Body Studio holds some of the denim insulation she used.
- (2) - The recycled denim in the walls of Platzer's studio provides insulation for sound and heat.
- (3) - Big windows at **MINDBODY Online** mean minimal interior lighting is needed.
- (4) - A desktop at **MINDBODY Online** is made from aluminum post-industrial scrap. At right, the carpet is made from recycled plastic bottles, and the flooring is made from cork.
- (5) -
- (6) - Rick Stollmeyer
- (1) - Marilyn Farmer
- (2) - Habitat Studio on Marsh Street in San Luis Obispo used carpets made from recycled materials.
- (3) TRIBUNE PHOTOS BY JOE JOHNSTON - Owner Marilyn Farmer was mindful of sustainable design and health in her studio.
- (4) - Bambu Batu owner Fred Hornaday installed energy-saving fluorescent lights in his retail space.
- (5) - Hornaday hasn't had to change his fluorescent bulbs in a year and a half.

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