



Green Businesses Working for an Environmentally Friendly Community

By Alex Webster, Earthscope Reporter

(This article was published in the Marin Scope Community Newspaper of February 3-9, 2004)

With sister projects opening all over the state and country, and the extension of its outreach with new programs, the Bay Area Green Business Program is meeting its goal of assisting, recognizing and promoting a more environmentally friendly workplace.

Since the program began eight years ago in Alameda County, it has expanded throughout the Bay Area, and will soon be found in Santa Cruz and Sacramento. Similar projects are now being crafted in Arizona with the Bay Area Green Business Program as a model.

"We have become a resource, where before there were none, for businesses, government agencies and schools who want to be more resource-efficient," said Dana Armanino, head of the program's Marin County division. "We are helping these institutions not only be environmentally friendly, but to save money."

Throughout the Bay Area, over 300 businesses and government agencies have been certified as "green," with almost 50 in Marin County alone.

In order to become a certified "green" business, participants must meet stringent guidelines to conserve resources, prevent pollution and minimize waste. The program supports participants by providing them with resources to help them meet standards, and publicizing their businesses once they have.

"Consumers who care about our environment and want to spend their money accordingly can trust the Bay Area Green Business decal on my window," said "green" business owner Jennifer Melikian. She installed energy-efficient appliances and light bulbs in her San Anselmo business Juice Joint as part of her efforts to make it more environmentally friendly.

In addition to its history of certifying businesses and government agencies, last year the program began certifying environmentally friendly schools with Sir Francis Drake High School in San Anselmo.

Recognizing environmentally aware schools began with the efforts of SEA-DISC, Drake's environmental education program. Last year, four students worked on a project to certify the school as "green." In January, the Tamalpais Union School District Board of Trustees awarded Drake High \$6,000, which represents the estimated value of energy saved over the last year.

"It's very exciting to see the concrete evidence of the work we put in last year, and continue to put in to make Drake more environmentally friendly," said SEA-DISC senior Suzan Loshin.

This year, SEA-DISC students have lined up two elementary schools to be certified as well. The schools are St. Rita's Elementary in Fairfax and Brookside Elementary in San Anselmo.

The Bay Area Green Business Program's Marin division has recently created a second level of certification called Sustainable Partners, open to businesses that are already "green" certified and want to go further.

Sustainable Partners is designed to recognize certified Marin County green businesses that are top community performers in the county - those who go above and beyond environmental compliance to attain levels of management that benefit people, the environment and communities as a whole.

These requirements can be met in many ways. "For example," Armanino explains, "Patagonia offers a paid month off for their employees to volunteer."

So far, EcoTimber in San Rafael is the first business to be certified under the program's second division. Despite the program's success, Armanino continues to seek improvement in the resources it offers and to expand the program to reach more areas. "I would love to see the Bay Area Green Business Program continue to expand into other counties and further," she said.

RESOURCES:

To find out about EECOM's Sustainable Business Project in Marin County, contact Robert Gould at robertc.gould@comcast.net

Bay Area Green Business Program: www.abag.ca.gov/bayarea/enviro/gbus/gb.html

SEA-DISC: <http://drake.marin.k12.ca.us/academics/seadisc/whatis2.htm>.