

Green Initiatives – Communities

By Symone Salisbury

Painting Northeast Indiana Green

Northeast Indiana is no stranger to green practices, especially in Fort Wayne where the region's first official green building (music company Sweetwater Sound) stands and energy-saving LED traffic lights have replaced the city's nearly 6,000 traffic signals.

Now there is Grassroots Green of Northern Indiana. Established in 2006, its main focus is promoting eco-friendly practices through its "Green Living Guide for Northeast Indiana" as part of a fundraising initiative. The guide features money-saving strategies at home and in the workplace that reduce energy consumption. It contains profiles of community members and coupons for local environmentally minded businesses.

Not-for-profit organizations and schools purchase the guides from Grassroots Green for \$5 each and sell them for \$15. In addition, regional Kroger and Scott's grocery stores carry the publication.

Among topics discussed are benefits of home geothermal systems, carpooling, locally grown food, green building techniques, wetland restoration and environmentally responsible tactics at the office.

"We want to reach everyone," explains Pamela Steinbach (who co-founded Grassroots Green with her husband, John), "especially people who wouldn't normally read anything about the environment or who don't see the problem."

"Our biggest obstacle is helping people understand they can do something different with a fundraiser," John observes. "They're so into thinking that fundraisers involve selling junk food or carwashes."

He also points out the importance of supporting the "reconomy," in which "people are buying, selling, donating and sharing gently used items rather than always going after the shiny, flashy, new ones."

The second edition of the "Green Living Guide" will be published this fall.

Another initiative is the Green Organization Challenge, involving free energy audits of businesses and non-profits. Participants track subsequent progress and those with the best practices will be recognized by Grassroots Green and the city. The first to take part was the Boys & Girls Clubs of Fort Wayne.

The Steinbachs plan to expand their overall approach to places like Columbus, Ohio; Indianapolis; and Albuquerque, New Mexico to "highlight what's already going on and connect the dots (among environmentally focused groups)."

"One of the common frameworks out there is the triple bottom line, or principles of sustainability," John maintains. "There's people, planet and profits. In businesses, to really be sustainable you have to look at those three aspects. We usually look at the last first, but it's increasingly urgent to look at all three."

Resources: John and Pamela Steinbach, Grassroots Green of Northern Indiana, at (260) 744-2122 or www.grassrootsgreen.us

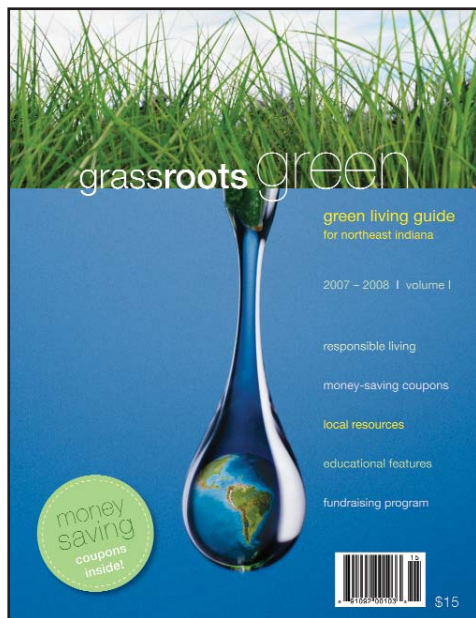
Pumping Up Support of Biofuels and Pollution Reduction

A regional effort to conserve Indiana's natural resources and stimulate the economy includes the entire state in many of its long-term initiatives.

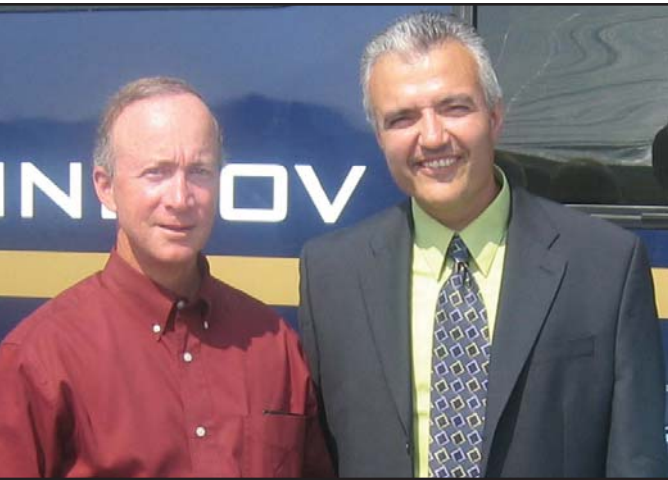
Lake County-based South Shore Clean Cities (SSCC) is part of a nationwide government-industry partnership sponsored by the U.S. Department of Energy. Its goal is to improve air quality and reduce U.S. dependence on foreign oil by promoting alternative transportation fuels in Northern Indiana.

One non-traditional fueling option involves E85 stations, which combine corn-based ethanol (85%) with petroleum (15%). SSCC has been among the advocates in helping to secure funding for many of the more than 100 scattered statewide. Prior to 2005, none existed in the state.

Retailers interested in buying new fueling equipment or converting existing tanks can seek assistance through the E85 Fueling Station Grant Program administered by the Indiana State



The "Green Living Guide" contains energy-saving tips and coupons for local businesses.



Governor Mitch Daniels, pictured with South Shore Clean Cities (SSCC) co-coordinator Carl Lisek, proclaimed April 28, 2008 Biofuels Day. That same day, SSCC held a conference with local and national leaders to promote biofuels.

Department of Agriculture. Approximately \$1 million will be awarded, with each location eligible for up to \$20,000 in funding.

Retrofitting school buses with pollution reduction technology is another major initiative. So far, 35 buses have been upgraded.

“We started with Lake and Porter counties because they have some of the worst air quality in the state,” explains SSCC co-coordinator Carl Lisek.

“We’re going to retrofit over 400 (in those counties), but our goal is to have this technology on all school buses throughout Indiana.”

Recently, SSCC formed the Indiana Clean Diesel Coalition in partnership with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management and the Central Indiana Clean Cities Alliance to “work not only with schools, but also public and private agencies to help implement retrofitting technology throughout the state.”

Educating the public about idle reduction is also a focus of SSCC. Its “smart idle” web site points out that idling for 10 seconds uses more fuel than turning off a vehicle and restarting it.

“There is not one silver bullet for our energy crisis,” Lisek asserts. “It’s a combination of a lot of different things we all need to work on together.”

Resources: Carl Lisek, South Shore Clean Cities, at (219) 365-4289, www.southshorecleancities.org or www.smartidle.com

Greene County Living Up to Its Name

How green is Greene County?

The southwest Indiana county known for its recreational areas has a modest population (30,000), but includes an expansive 540 square miles. That leaves a lot of ground to cover for the Greene County Recycling Center, operated by the county’s solid waste management district in Switz City.

The facility has two recycling centers and accepts items from surrounding counties. Examples are household hazardous wastes (i.e. paint, motor oil, antifreeze, vehicle batteries and fluorescent light bulbs), plastic and paper bags, food cans (soup, coffee and more), paper and corrugated cardboard. In addition, used clothes and books are collected through a partnership with Goodwill Industries in Terre Haute.

There is a pass-through fee of \$5 for all household appliances (refrigerators, washers and dryers) and a charge for tires (based on size) that starts at \$2.

“One thing that comes with having a big county is illegal dumping,” comments administrator Debbie Haseman. “We try not to charge for anything (beyond household appliances and tires) because it’s likely to show up in a ditch if we do.”

On the flip side, a buy-back program offers cash to individuals disposing of aluminum beverage cans. Plus, individuals recycling at the facility can also drop off non-recyclable trash at a cost of just \$1 per bag.

“There would be very little to throw away (once people have dropped off their recyclables),” Haseman comments. “It (offers) great savings for people

on a fixed income and reduces the amount of trash (sent) to our landfills.”

Education also plays an important role in Greene County’s eco-friendly efforts, with all five school districts participating in field trips to the recycling center.

Resource: Debbie Haseman, Greene County Solid Waste Management District, at (812) 659-3788



According to Debbie Haseman, Greene County Solid Waste Management District administrator, each person in the United States creates an average of five pounds of trash per day.

Environmental Fair Spotlights Local Businesses

When it comes to recycling, the question many people ask isn’t “why,” but “how?”

Hosted by Indiana University South Bend this spring, the Green Michiana Sustainability Fair provided several answers by connecting 50 business exhibitors (ranging from manufacturers and construction companies to lawn care providers and eateries) with 700 attendees.

The goal was to promote business networking and to increase awareness of alternative forms of energy and recycling.

Among products showcased were biodegradable cleaning products, recycled roofing tiles, a high-efficiency biofuel furnace and an electric car. In addition, the solid waste management department promoted proper disposal of hazardous wastes such as paints, batteries and televisions.

"They can only collect certain types of plastics and you have to pay attention to that because if you mix the wrong kind of plastics, it can contaminate the whole batch," cautions Deb Marr, associate professor, department of biological sciences at IU South Bend.

One display focused on a local government initiative.

"One major focus in South Bend has been on water quality in the St. Joseph River and the combined sewer overflow issue," Marr explains. "The city of South Bend teamed with engineers and developed a method (using microchips in pipes) for regulating water flow into the river better."

People also learned about South Bend's first community garden. Adults and children alike began greening their thumbs at Greenhouse Garden this spring. Headed by the South Bend Community Gardens group, it is one of several planned in the area.

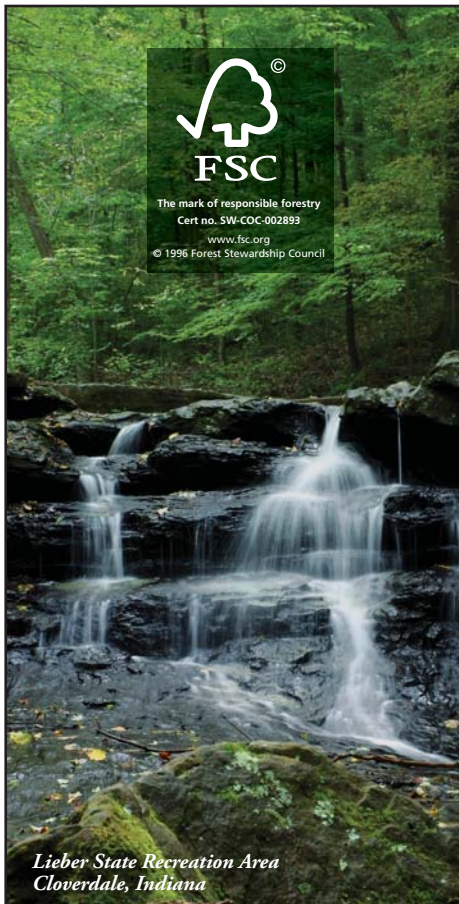
During a weeklong recycling drive culminating at the fair, IU South Bend collected more than 150,000 plastic bags and 5,000 gallons of Styrofoam. People also were encouraged to drop off old computer equipment and packing peanuts at the event.

"If we had tried to do this 10 years ago, I'm not sure we would have had as much excitement about it," Marr reflects, "but I think the time is right and people are interested in finding different ways of doing things."

Resource: Deb Marr, Indiana University South Bend, at dmarr@iusb.edu



Electric cars, which reduce pollution, were among environmentally friendly products on display at the South Bend event.



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