

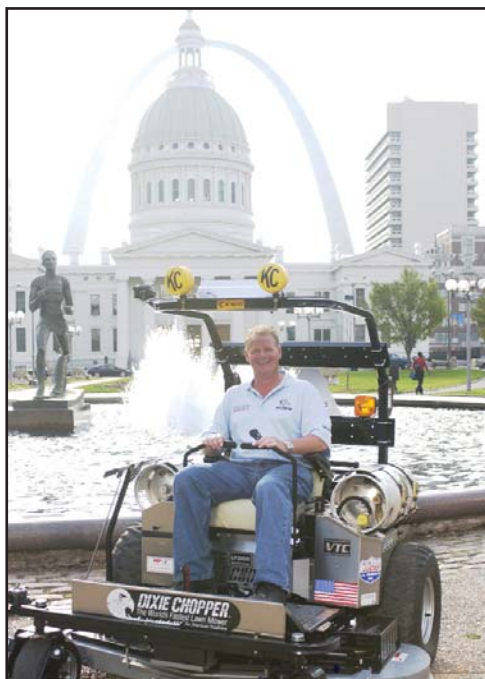
Green Initiatives – Companies

By Candace Gwaltney

This Grass Really Is Greener

Matt Land embarked on a nearly three-week voyage across the country on a lawn mower last summer. The goal: meet with California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger to show off Dixie Chopper's clean burning propane machine.

While that meeting with the green-state governor never happened, suffice to say Land believes in the propane mower. The sales and marketing director drew plenty of attention as he drove the mower along Route 66.



Matt Land, Dixie Chopper sales and marketing director, shows off the company's propane lawn mower in St. Louis. He drove the mower from Indiana to California to promote the product.

Dixie Chopper, based in Coatesville, is the first company to develop and sell an original engine manufactured propane-powered lawn mower (other companies sell conversion kits for gasoline models). The system cuts ozone forming emissions by more than 50% compared to conventional gasoline powered engines, according to Dixie Chopper data.

Initial sales (the model has been on the market for nearly two years) have been slow, but persistence is the name of the game for this company.

"Honestly, anytime you are first to market with something it's difficult," Land admits. "Really it would have been easy for us to give up because it wasn't like the world started beating down the doors to our warehouse."

When Dixie Chopper first started in the 1980s, it was tough to sell a mower that had steering levers instead of a wheel, but people started to realize the benefits of the speedy, zero turning mower. Land says they are at that brink again.

"When crude oil went over \$100 a barrel, all of the sudden that made people pay attention. So I think we found the green people really are interested in. We thought it was the environment, but apparently it's the wallet."

In January the Central Indiana Clean Cities Alliance presented Dixie Chopper with its 2008 CICCA Stakeholder Achievement Award for developing the propane-powered mower.

Customers include the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and a Harvard University landscaper, Land says.

The maintenance crew at the Columbus Airport uses four of the propane mowers daily for six or seven hours. Maintenance manager Larry Stone has tried many different mowers in his 36 years at the airport and says the Dixie Chopper propane model is "probably the best I've had."

He sees how much cleaner the propane burns each morning. As the crew starts up the mowers inside the garage for the day, there is hardly any exhaust now, he says. Stone has noticed the air filter doesn't need cleaned as often and the oil is cleaner when doing routine maintenance to the units.

As a municipal facility, the switch has also saved the city money. The mowers use two tanks of the propane a day, which costs about \$34. Last summer the airport used mowers that burned about 18 gallons of gasoline a day at \$3 a gallon, Stone relates.

This is the first summer the airport has used the propane mowers. "We just took a big chance, and it's paid off," he asserts.

Resource: Matt Land, Dixie Chopper, at (765) 246-7737 or www.dixiechopper.com

Organic Birth of a Business

Locavores (people who prefer to eat locally grown food), eat your hearts out. Central Indiana company Hoosier Organic Connection offers an easy way to support local organic farmers through its online-based delivery service that brings fresh fruits and vegetables to customers' doorsteps.

The service is the brainchild of two Hamilton County men – Mike Goss and Justin Fiore. Goss had recently bought a small farm in Arcadia when the two families discussed their similar interests in starting a food delivery company.

“We came up with the concept of Hoosier Organic Connection – it was to bring together local family farms here in Indiana, focusing on sustainability, organic or growing organically,” Fiore asserts.

Customers subscribe to the service online for a weekly fee of \$38 to \$55, depending on the size of box they want (biweekly deliveries are another option). The box of fruits and vegetables featuring locally grown organic produce is delivered to the customer’s doorstep. What’s in the box is based on what’s in season, but families can alter their selection (in case of food allergies or if the family is going through a “banana phase,” Fiore explains) by visiting the web site.

The base service only includes produce, but add-ons are available for additional fees. Options include local eggs, chicken, lamb, elk, Amish breads and noodles, and Trader’s Point Creamery yogurt, milk and cheese, Fiore says.

Food is sourced from 25 locally owned organic farms all over Indiana (including Bloomington, Kokomo, Rockville and Hamilton County). During the farms’ off-season, Hoosier Organic Connection buys from organic wholesalers to allow for year-round deliveries.

Deliveries currently are to Hamilton County and northern Marion County. Since deliveries started in July 2007, 60 families have joined. And that number is growing, Fiore adds.

You won’t see advertisements for this family-owned start-up. Everything has been funded out of pocket and marketing hasn’t been a part of the budget. Instead, HOC relies on word of mouth, fliers in yoga studios (Justin’s wife Sheryl is an instructor) and other grassroots efforts.

The idea came, in part, from Fiore’s experience driving around to multiple stores to ensure he was buying the best organic food for his family.

“We really (created) Hoosier Organic to be a vehicle for sustainability, for consciousness and for giving back to the community and connecting the best elements we have here in Indiana with one another and with families.”

Fiore continues: “We’re able to build relationships with the farmers, and we know how it’s being grown, what’s grown and what methods are being used. It’s all about relationships.”

Resource: Justin Fiore, Hoosier Organic Connection, at www.hoosierorganics.com



Online ordering is an easy process for customers.

Impressing Customers on the Print Side

Becoming an eco-company has proven to have dual meaning for an Indianapolis printing company – it’s ecologically friendly and economically smart.

Fineline Printing Group reduced chemicals required in the printing process and started buying green energy. Getting the word out about these and other green practices is paying off through recognition and customer interest.

Initially, Fineline’s green movement was a marketing effort. When Shawn Smith, director of marketing and public relations, joined the company he noticed the eco-friendly business practices already in place and realized they could attract customers.

“Being able to offer our customers a green option has been very beneficial to us,” Smith asserts. “We’ve had people who actually found us specifically because they needed to work with green suppliers.”

Fineline first identified green practices already in place such as recycling, use of soy-based ink and reusing rags to clean the printing press. The company then brought in an ink vendor to conduct a “green audit” of the facility. That process helped define what the company is doing right and identify more ways it can embrace green practices.

Fineline Printing Group uses soy-based ink on its largest printing press. Green practices have helped attract business for the company.



Earlier this year Fineline began purchasing green energy from Indianapolis Power and Light. IPL's program allows businesses and homeowners to specify they want their power to be generated by environmentally friendly resources such as wind, solar or biomass generation.

Fineline purchases 25% green power, which earned the company U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Green Power Partner certification. Plans are to increase participation each year until green energy usage reaches 100%, Smith explains.

Chemicals used in production at Fineline have low levels or no VOCs (volatile organic compounds). The company is also using a new chemistry with the printing plates that extends the life of the chemistry – before the solution could be used for 600 plates, but now it's lasting through 1,200 plates, pressroom manager Roy Keen explains.

Extending the life of the chemistry means there is less waste. Keen expects the more environmental process will also save the company money.

Since learning about the green initiatives, some of Fineline's customers have switched to printing on recyclable materials to further green their orders, he states.

"Obviously it's the new catch phrase: going green," Keen surmises. Still, more people have expressed interest at a faster pace than he expected. Businesses are looking for other businesses to help them go green, and that's helping Fineline, he adds.

Resource: Fineline Printing Group at (317) 872-4490 or www.finelink.com

It's in the (Kroger) Bag

For the eco-conscious (and the thrifty), those piles of pesky plastic bags from a grocery run translate into lunch bags, trash can liners and other forms to practice the middle leg of the three-R mantra (reduce, reuse and recycle).

Kroger Co. is helping customers add "reduce" and "recycle" to their routine by selling reusable bags in all of its Indiana stores and providing bins for customers to drop off plastic bags for recycling. Customers can bring not only the Kroger bags, but plastic from other retailers (such as dry cleaner bags).

And customers have been dropping off their unwanted sacks by the truckload, literally.

Plastic recycled in the first five months of the program by the company's central division (includes stores in Indiana, Illinois and a handful in other states) exceeded 184.4 tons – that's 12 semi-trailer loads, notes John Elliott, Kroger Central Division spokesman.

Recycling or reusing one ton of plastic bags saves the energy equivalent of 11 barrels of oil, according to information from the Sierra Club.

Kroger receives a small fee for the recycled plastic, but not enough to turn a profit – and that's not the goal. The fee roughly covers the cost to administer the program. Also, the reusable bags are sold at cost.

"Our intent is to encourage good environmental stewardship – not to make a financial profit," Elliott offers.

"We know that our associates, customers and community leaders strongly support these initiatives and we hope that leads them to shop in our stores as a way of demonstrating that they agree with our strong

environmental stewardship initiatives," Elliott writes in an e-mail.

Nearly all of Kroger's 2,800 food stores nationwide are participating in both the recycling and reusable bag programs, but the central division (comprised of 154 stores) is at the head of the class. In the last quarter of 2007, that group sold more reusable bags than any other Kroger division in the country. Customers bought 22,554 reusable bags from November to April, and the number of people using the bags has noticeably increased, Elliott adds.

Resource: Kroger Co. at www.kroger.com



Reusable bags and recycling are popular options at Kroger.