

Waste Not, Want Not

Recycling Thriving in Northwest Indiana

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Out of sight, out of mind? It's not that easy when it comes to waste disposal. Old televisions, discarded glass bottles and hazardous household materials all have to go *somewhere*.

Many times, these items are sent to landfills. The problem? Garbage dumps pose potential environmental dangers such as groundwater and air pollution. Plus, some experts contend that the United States is running out of landfill space.

In Northwest Indiana, however, several initiatives are helping to reduce waste. The city of Valparaiso currently diverts 49% of residential trash away from landfills through recycling. In addition, a number of projects throughout the region are advancing sustainable construction and other green efforts.

Among activities:

- Berglund Construction, a commercial general contractor and construction management firm headquartered in Chicago, built a 6,000-square-foot facility to house operations in Chesterton. It features extensive natural lighting, low VOC (volatile organic compound) products, recycled materials and more
- Valparaiso-based beer wholesaler North Coast Distributing is working to decrease business waste internally and via partnerships with retailers and the city
- The first project in the Marquette Plan, extensive redevelopment of the Lake Michigan lakefront, is Portage Lakefront Park. Spanning 57 acres, it boasts a 7,700-square-foot pavilion, riverwalk and fishing pier (portions of each contain recycled materials), walking and biking trail, and revamped breakwater

Valparaiso's "Brighten Up" program offers residents an easy way to make a difference in their community. Students who were winners of a citywide paper recycling contest proudly pose near the bench they won for Thomas Jefferson Elementary School. The bench is comprised of 1,550 recycled milk cartons.

Easy come, easy go

"The key to recycling is to make it convenient for the average person," asserts Valparaiso city administrator Bill Oeding.

Recycling translates to more than \$160,000 in annual savings for the city.

Oeding says awareness-raising activities and community support are instrumental in the successful recycling endeavors.

"The neat thing about being in Valparaiso and doing these green initiatives is that the





Natural light shines into all areas of Berglund Construction's Chesterton office. Mother Nature also plays a key role in reducing energy consumption at the Portage beach pavilion as light fixtures reduce their brightness based on the availability of daylight.

community is interested in saving the environment and doing our fair share, and I think our community is willing to pay for it and make that happen," he emphasizes.

One of the most popular programs is "Brighten Up" curbside recycling. Introduced in 2007, it was met with enthusiasm from residents. Participants were provided with 96-gallon wheeled containers (replacing 18-gallon totes) bearing a bright yellow lid.

"The response was overwhelming," Oeding comments. "We got a grant from IDEM, so we bought a lot of them. We went through all of them, and we keep buying them when we can afford them."

Later this summer, the city will begin coordinating recycling and trash pickup on the same day.

"We studied a number of neighborhoods where trash and recycling was on the same day," Oeding relates. "There was 20% higher participation."

Additional efforts include a plastic bag recycling program, distribution of reusable bags, co-mingling of recycling materials, free curbside recycling for white goods (large appliances and electronics such as washing machines and dryers) and drop-off locations for hazardous products and large items.

Among future goals? Achieving a 70% diversion rate by 2011.

"We have a long way to go, but we're pretty optimistic," Oeding confides.

George Douglas, North Coast Distributing general manager, says the company was inspired to implement a green task force after Colorado-based New Belgium Brewing Company signed on as a supplier: "It's wind powered, and they're kind of on the forefront of sustainability. It sort of ignited our passion that we could do a lot more."



Laying down (new) roots

Established in 1911, Berglund Construction primarily serves the health care, higher education and corporate sectors. Offices are in Illinois and Indiana, but the firm also has a presence in Ohio and Wisconsin.

When business growth necessitated larger office space in Chesterton, Berglund began making plans for a new eco-friendly structure. Staff moved in last fall.

"This whole green process started even as far back as site selection," recalls senior vice president Bill Gorski. "We located the building within 10 essential services, according to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) criteria, ranging from convenience stores to day care facilities to pharmacies. It promotes alternative transportation. If someone wanted to walk to the building, they could have that kind of connectivity."

In addition, the site employs numerous cost and energy-saving elements such as high-efficiency heating and ventilation units (lowering annual utility expenses by approximately 30%), a plumbing system estimated to save approximately 68,000 gallons of water per year and native landscaping that doesn't require irrigation. During construction, Berglund diverted 75% of waste from landfills.

When considering progress taking place in the region involving sustainable design and construction, Gorski muses, "The initiatives are greatly increasing. I think the economic recovery act will further sustainability and green practices within the area."

Cheers

North Coast distributes more than 150 brands of beer throughout Northwest Indiana. Founded in 1939, it employs approximately 150 people.

General manager George Douglas describes the impetus for helping to form an internal green committee, which held its first meeting on Earth Day.

"Any good business is always looking at ways to reduce its waste and take costs out of the business," he stresses. "We realized there was more we could do and wanted to go deeper into the culture of the company."

Focus areas are improving internal practices, encouraging employees to adopt green habits at home and partnering with retailers and the community.

The team identified 21 initial action items such as recycling paper, plastic containers and other materials; purchasing only recyclable cups; and bringing all shrink-wrap for delivery back

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to North Coast Distributing for recycling.

"Some of our retail accounts in the community already are working with the city (to recycle)," he notes. "We'll sit down with those that aren't (and say), 'We think there's an opportunity. Here's what the city can do.'"

"I'm very excited," Douglas declares. "There's a lot of enthusiasm (surrounding the committee)."

On the waterfront

A neighboring steel mill's wastewater treatment facility once occupied the grounds at Portage Lakefront Park. Currently, officials are awaiting approval regarding gold LEED status by the U.S. Green Building Council.

Completed last November, the pavilion is the centerpiece of the project. Amenities include reserved parking for low-emitting and fuel efficient vehicles, a geothermal heating and cooling system that consumes 27% less energy than required by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air-Conditioning Engineers and a white roof to lessen solar heat gain.

"There weren't any native species compatible with the green roof systems we were looking at, so we did the white roof instead," explains project manager Nathan Witte of Design Organization, a sustainability-focused architecture and interiors firm with offices in Valparaiso and Chicago. It also

spearheaded work on Berglund's Chesterton facility.

Although it's too early to quantify financial benefits, Eric Ehn, management assistant at Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, says the changes are already making a positive impression on beachgoers.

"The folks I've run into think it's fantastic," he shares. "They think the building is beautiful and the whole setup is really nicely done."

Witte reflects, "This was a wonderful opportunity not only to work with such a great site, but also with clients who really had the foresight to pursue these green goals and to set an example for development in Northwest Indiana."

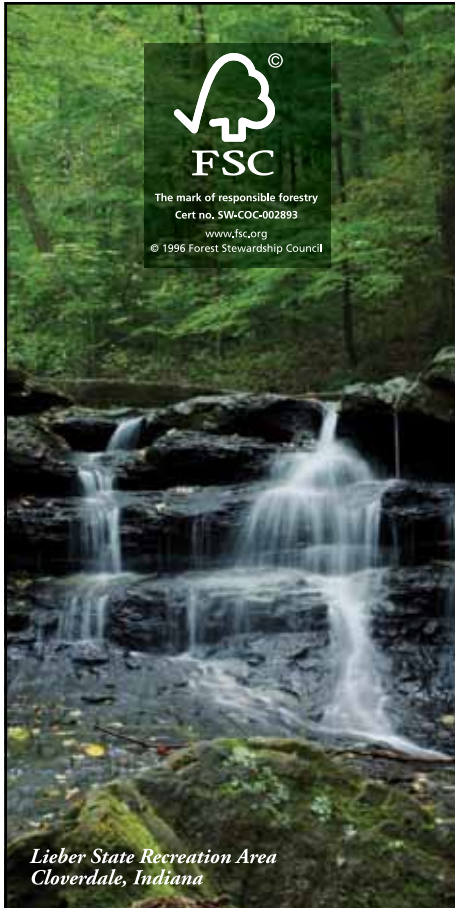
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