

WACO WE D.I.G.

by Scott Connell, Senior Vice President, Strategic Development

Green is good business. That's not a contradiction. Sustainable practices are becoming more common in the workplace. Companies are focusing on reducing the impacts of their processes and employees on the environment. Greater Waco is front and center in this tide of change.

A quiet movement is underway in Waco area businesses toward sustainability. They are emphasizing a focus on waste elimination and new technologies and maximizing the use of raw materials tracking the costs of landfill shipments and utility expenses. Local companies also are encouraging and teaching their employees to recycle and diminish their daily water streams at work.

Sustainability focuses on lowering our daily impact on the environment—locally, regionally, nationally and throughout the world. It's evidence of a connectedness among us all.

Typically, companies emphasize green practices for four primary reasons—the environment, their employees, their customers and their expenses.

Regardless of the details, it is clear we are having an impact on our local environment in Greater Waco—both positive and negative. The recent issues of coal-fired power plants and the Bosque River dairy operations have garnered the attention of our community regarding the effects air and water quality on business. In addition to the general health issues, one industry protecting the environment can help ensure safe resources for another.

If Greater Waco goes non-attainment—or exceeds the government-mandated standards—for air quality, it will be more expensive and difficult for businesses to operate in our area. If water quality is compromised, it affects all businesses, especially our key industries of food and beverage and pharmaceuticals.

People will seek out workplaces in healthy environments. From the shop floor to office buildings, a national effort is happening to improve work environments for all employees. Skilled and technical employees are in tight supply. While attracting the best talent, HR directors hear potential employees ask about the company's green policies.

Additionally, customers are seeking companies and products that consider the environment. Traditional products and services are becoming more environmentally sensitive. Some of the fastest growing industries in the country are in green or "clean tech" areas of renewable energy, energy reduction and waste reduction. Companies in the Waco area are responding to the marketplace every day.

Finally, the bottom line is, well, the bottom line. Companies recognize that a decreased use of resources also can limit expenses. With increasing costs of fuel affecting the price of everything, cost containment is key to every business. Sustainable efforts can result in profitability.

The Greater Waco Chamber acknowledges the business impacts of sustainability. We have created the Waco



Photo by Jill Davis

The Chamber's green committee is ready to dig in. Some of them are Scott Connell, Greater Waco Chamber; Sherry Street, Keep Waco Beautiful; Rick Tullis, Capstone Mechanical; Megan Miller, City of Waco Solid Waste Services; and Kris Riley, Sunbright Paper.

We Do It Green (We D.I.G.) initiative to promote sustainability in the business community. We will inventory local business practices, identify and promote resources to assist business, work to attract new clean industries and encourage the community to be leaders in new green practices. The market is moving rapidly in the green direction. It is not always clear for small business to learn how to "be green." We will recognize best practices and help local companies connect to learn from one another.

We expect company efforts will help maintain the competitive cost of doing business in Greater Waco. We also look to achieve our recent Breakthrough Initiative of Greater Waco being recognized as one of the greenest cities in America. The business community will lead us there.

We also look forward to sharing our experiences at the Chamber. As we get settled into our new green headquarters, we will share with the membership the benefits of our new building and the new green practices we adopt—from recycling to using environmentally safe cleaning supplies. We hope you can get some ideas on "how did we do that."

If you are interested in participating in the Waco We D.I.G. committee, contact Scott Connell at (254) 757-5636. E-mail at sconnell@wacochamber.com and tell us what your company does to be green. ■

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