

Green Business Initiative in Lafayette

By Sophie Braccini

Tony Eichers is not only the Vice President- General Manager of the Lafayette Park Hotel; he wants to become a “green” mentor for the Lafayette business community. And there’s no better venue to do so than the newly formed Green Committee, spearheaded by the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce and Sustainable Lafayette, a local non-profit group.

“We started the group because we thought there would be an interest in the business community for “greener” practices,” says Jay Lifson, Executive Director of the Chamber. He adds, “We were surprised and delighted by the interest that immediately sprung.”

Steve Richards, one of the founders of Sustainable Lafayette agrees, “I was expecting people to show up out of curiosity. But I was surprised by the level of passion and energy people brought in.”

The movement started when Sustainable Lafayette joined the Chamber last year and started discussions with Lifson.

The proposal of a green committee was presented to the Board of the Chamber and approved in December of last year. The first kick-off meeting was held at the Chamber in January.

“We had great attendance because we had the opportunity to advertise and inform our constituency widely,” says Richards. The meeting gathered more than fifteen business owners who came for lunch and brainstorming about how to help businesses contribute to a sustainable living. “That first meeting was very dynamic,” says Bart Carr, the other founder of Sustainable Lafayette and Chair of the Green Committee, “tons of ideas were kicked around and we decided right away to hold a second meeting to define our actions.”

The second meeting was held on January 30th. The participants summarized all the ideas and four area of focus were identified:

- the sharing of information about how to be more green and available resources: web site, flyers, books, classes
 - a recognition program with different levels, that could be presented in a special section in the newsletter, and different ways to promote green businesses
 - the organization of more complete recycling options for businesses.
- That area is of great interest for businesses, since they do not always have the opportunities homeowners do and recycling is not as easy as it should be

- the creation of a pilot project, in the food industry, finding out what are the specific challenges and opportunities of that sector, and what could be done. The sub-committee would then share what was learnt from the pilot with all the local restaurants and food service businesses.

This last area is of particular interest to Eichers. “The Lafayette Hotel has been working on becoming more sustainable for a long time,” says the General Manager, “we recycle as much as we can and we use products inside that have as little negative impact on the environment as possible.”

The hotel is working at this time with Contra Costa Waste Management Authority to recycle food scraps. The program is available to homes in Lamorinda but not for businesses and Contra Costa is one of the last districts that have not addressed that problem already. “The hotel will be one of the pilots for the food recycling in Contra Costa,” proudly says Eichers, “we already recycle our oil, but with two restaurants and room service in the hotel, we need serious food scrap recycling.”

“Our next meeting will be held on Feb 27th during lunch at the Chamber office,” says Lifson. “We encourage all businesses to attend since we will decide on which projects to tackle first, their scope, and very importantly, who will work on it!”



Lafayette celebrates Earth Day

Photo Jay Lifson