

Green Heroes

Our inaugural list of the 50 most eco-friendly companies in Middle Tennessee [From the September/October issue of Nashville Post magazine]

By Drew Ruble

NashvillePost.com, 09-24-2010

Growing consumer desire for environmentally friendly business has led many companies to “green” their practices, making them more sustainable. In addition, many entrepreneurs have opened businesses with a green slant in recent years. The result? Green business has evolved into a profitable aspect of the business world for mom-and-pop shops and multinational companies alike.

What makes a business green? For this first-time ranking, we define a green business first as one that provides goods or services intended to improve the sustainability of others. For nearly every category of conventional consumer goods and services, there is a green alternative – from automobiles to marketing services.

Second, we define a green business as one that employs sustainable principles in their facilities and practices. As such, many of the businesses here are focused on keeping their environmental footprint small, reducing waste, reusing materials, using innovative building techniques and materials to promote energy efficiency, and even encouraging employees to think about the environment in their day-to-day business life. In many instances, the companies listed here fall into a third category of green business – those that fit both of the above descriptions.

A quick scan of this list will no doubt generate conversation – and even debate – due to the fact that a significant portion of the companies profiled here are larger companies, many of which a green purist might contend have at best a mixed environmental record. Without question, there are scant few large companies in Nashville, or anywhere for that matter, that have as a core business principle to decrease or even negate their environmental footprint.

But in acknowledging that the greatest potential for “greening” American business lies not so much in startup entrepreneurial ventures as in convincing larger, already established American companies to adopt greener policies, we’ve weighed the work of some of Middle Tennessee’s largest companies that are working to green their businesses accordingly – all the while noting that they could do more.

Rest assured, there’s still plenty of room here for profiles of smaller companies on the leading edge of the green movement. After all, the heartbeat of true environmental commitment is found predominantly in the large collective of small green businesses. And there are so many of them in Nashville that they do represent a power.

The companies on this list might be headquartered in Nashville or out of state with operations in Nashville. Some are for-profit and some not-for-profit. Represented here are both private enterprises and government agencies – even some institutions of higher education. Companies big and small have made the list, as have both originators and imitators of sustainable business goods and/or practices. Together, they comprise the best of the best of green Nashville businesses.

Many of these companies applied for the designation, while others have been editorially selected. Either way, we hope these profiles will help convince local businesses that going green is not only economically feasible but can in fact be a boon to the bottom line.

SSRCx

ssrcx.com

Smith Seckman Reid, an engineering design and facility consulting firm with more than 40 years of experience with health care, institutional, sports, entertainment and municipal projects, created this independent subsidiary in 2007 exclusively to provide LEED-facilitation services. A team of LEED-accredited professionals experienced in the design, construction and operation of high-performance green buildings, SSRCx's Sustainable Solutions Group offers LEED facilitation, sustainable design, retro-commissioning, energy advocacy, facility analysis reporting, power monitoring, asset management services and facility commissioning. (SSRCx is one of the few firms nationally licensed to offer continuous commissioning, a process developed by Texas A&M that typically reduces energy costs of existing buildings by 20 percent or more.) Such services help make buildings ecologically sustainable and improve the bottom line for clients using LEED procedures. SSRCx has commissioned more than 500 buildings. Local projects include Vanderbilt University's The Commons, Belmont University Law School, the Caterpillar Financial Center and the Schermerhorn Symphony Center.