



# GREEN SCENE

Companies look for savings with environmental sustainability

By Ross Boissoneau

Green is the new black when it comes to bottom lines.

Ed Belanger, the director of plant operations for Munson, said the creation of an energy conservation team there in 2008 paved the way to both environmental and cost savings.

“Our natural gas and electric consumption initial score was 23 out of 100,” he said. “That was the worst quartile.”

He said the health complex worked on and updated a number of concerning areas, including LED lighting upgrades, boiler tune-ups, switching to environmentally sensitive cleaning products, and installing time of day and occupancy sensors in the operating rooms.

“That was a big one,” he said about the operating room sensors.

To maintain a sterile environment, the air in the OR is constantly pressurized.

“We have 20 air exchanges an hour. That pushes air away from the sterile environment,” he said. “When nobody is in there, we reduced it to six. That saved a ton of energy.”

Construction of the LEED-certified Cowell Family Cancer Center in 2016 also

took such concerns into account, integrating such things as the use of electrically charged water in floor cleaning, which meant no additional chemicals are needed.

The result of all those still ongoing efforts?

“By 2019 we were ENERGY STAR

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– Josh Patrick, media spokesperson, Consumers Energy

certified,” said Belanger, referring to the federal Environmental Protection Agency’s long-time energy-saving program. “We went from 23 to 78. We’re in the top quartile for Midwest hospitals for energy usage.”

Given its size relative to Munson, the energy gains for Mitchell Graphics in Petoskey and Traverse City have been more modest. But they still impact the company’s bottom line and shape the company’s culture, said owner Gary Fedus.

“It’s been a big part of our culture pret-

ty much since the beginning,” he said.

For the printing company, one major concern has been recovering and re-utilizing all products that would otherwise go into a landfill.

So they partnered with Emmet County, helping to develop its waste management

and recycling program, he says.

“We recycle just about every part of our waste, from carpet and plastic to personal use – my Kind bar wrapper gets recycled every day,” he said.

This green mindset also affected a recent office renovation.

“Everything we had we repurposed, recycled or gave away,” he said.

The company has been in business for 50 years, and Fedus has been in charge since 2006.

“Since I’ve been running it, (concern for the environment) has been more in the forefront,” he said.

The company also joined the program Petoskey offered for providing electricity generated by renewable sources. Fedus said it will be used for up to 50% of its electricity usage, even though he admitted it is slightly more expensive.

When it comes to that electricity, the region’s largest power company, Consumers Energy, is trying to do its part.

“The big thing is our clean energy plan,” said Josh Patrick, a media spokesperson for Consumers, referring to the company’s plan to go coal-free by 2025.

He said utilizing a combination of solar, wind and hydropower will eventually be both more affordable and more stable than using fossil fuels. The utility’s plan is to be generating 8,000 megawatts from solar by 2040.

“It’s cost-stable,” he said. “There are more fluctuations in the (current) market.”

He said the use by consumers of power-saving products and practices – from LED bulbs to the hydro power provided by the Ludington pump storage facility – provides opportunities for cost savings for the utility as well as its customers.



“We’re one of the only companies in America that wants people to use less of our product,” said Patrick. “That places less demand on the power grid.”

In Frankfort, owners of Stormcloud Brewing Company owners have retrofitted the building they purchased with LED lights and are starting a commuter program for employees that rewards them for not driving a car or truck to work.

“It’s part of our core mission,” said Rick Schmitt, who opened the brewpub with Brian Confer in 2013.

The pair have since opened a new brewing facility on the east side of town. Not only did they install LED lights and an 8 KW solar energy system, the facility was

engineered with light tubes that route daylight into the facility. Schmitt said most days they don’t have to even turn on the lights. It even has a car-charging station.

You’ll find several car charging stations at Crystal Mountain Resort and Spa.

“More and more people are using our chargers,” said Jim MacInnes, who owns the resort with his wife Chris. “I can go 40 miles for \$1. It’s a good thing to be doing these days.”

That’s just one of the ways the resort is working to minimize its carbon footprint, according to MacInnes, an engineer by trade.

“When we built our last building, we used a closed loop geothermal heat pump” for heating and cooling, he said.

The five miles of pipe is reminiscent of what it’s done for snowmaking, where bigger pipes mean less friction and more snowmaking with less horsepower.

And yes, plenty of LEDs. MacInnes said they installed 300 LED lights in the Crystal Conference Center.

“We saved enough to power a Chevy Volt 200,000 miles a year,” MacInnes said.

At TentCraft, decisions made to directly benefit the company and its customers have had an environmental benefit as well.

“The biggest thing is that since 2018 we’ve been manufacturing everything in-house,” said Andrew Dodson, the content marketing and public relations manager for the company.

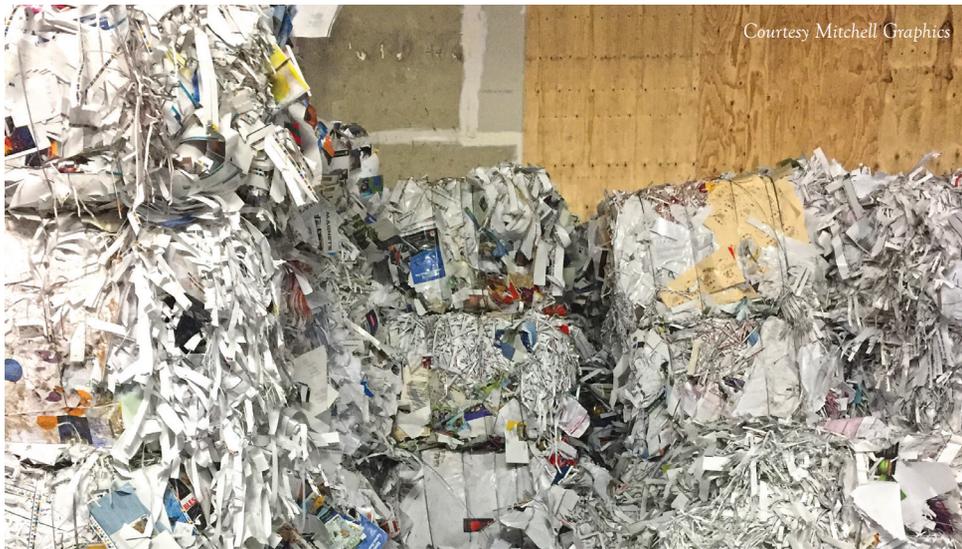
He said that means the company can control the quality of all its components and processes.

“Our competitors import tent frames from China with varying levels of quality,” he said. “We hear from customers all the time that they’re sick of throwing away their tents because they broke too easily.”

That commitment to quality and recycling extends to its own waste material. TentCraft’s partnership with PriorLife, a division of Britten, enables its overprinted vinyl to be used for tote bags.

“We have recycled 50,000 pounds of metal since 2019, which has resulted in a return of more than \$12,100,” said Dodson.

Most of the metal is aluminum, which



Courtesy Mitchell Graphics

they say is nearly infinitely recyclable. Kelly Yauk, digital marketing manager, said TentCraft sources its aluminum only from suppliers that use a minimum of 70% recycled material.

TentCraft is also piloting a logistics program for outdoor goods retailer REI. Instead of purchasing a new tent for every store opening, TentCraft holds the tents after they've been used and then ships them to the next new store.

Programs like that and the fact its tents are so long-lasting mean those companies or clients won't be buying as many tents from TentCraft.

"But (our customers) make our best salespeople," said Yauk.

On Traverse City's east side, the new headquarters of the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy (GTRLC) will be outfitted with numerous green features, including high-efficiency insulation, a geothermal system to heat and cool the buildings and smart electric panels that reduce the load when buildings aren't in use.

Other innovations include collecting water runoff from the roof, filtering it, and then using it to flush the toilets and irrigate native landscaping and the on-site greenhouse. Solar panels on the grounds are sized to completely offset the projected energy use. As an added benefit, the panels will offer protection from the elements for the small herd of goats that will call



Courtesy Crystal Mountain

the grounds home when they're not on other preserves managing invasive species.

David Foote, the director of facilities for GTRLC, is hopeful the many efficien-

cies built into the Conservation Center will offset both energy use and cost. The goal is to hit net-zero in energy expenses, he said.