

August 16, 2006

Bay Area Green Business

by Carla Bova

Some employees at Wealth Plus Inc. of Corte Madera carpool to work and others walk or ride their bikes. Design Communications of Ross uses recycled paper and non-toxic ink. Equinox Landscape of San Rafael applies organic gardening techniques.

They were among 11 Marin enterprises recognized Tuesday by the Board of Supervisors as "certified green businesses" for employing environmentally-friendly practices. There are now 125 certified green businesses in a program launched in 2002 by the county Community Development Agency.

"We want to recognize those putting in the effort to reduce the impact their businesses have," said Dana Armanino, county green business coordinator. "Certification means these businesses have signed on to conserve energy, water and resources. They recycle and close that loop by purchasing recycled products. They reduce pollution and use less-toxic materials in their operations."

Armanino said that including similar programs in six other counties, there are about 600 businesses certified as "green" in the Bay Area. Nearly 21 percent of those are in Marin.

Other green businesses recognized Tuesday are: At Home in Marin, San Rafael; Bamboo & More, Mill Valley; Green Career Tracks, San Anselmo; Inspiration Inc., San Rafael; Marin County Farmers Market Association, San Rafael; Marin Outdoor Living, Greenbrae; San Anselmo Cooperative Nursery School, San Anselmo; and TLC Commercial Capital, Mill Valley.

"We are joining a network of other businesses with similar values," said Heather Picard, who owns Equinox Landscape with her husband, Patrick. "The more people using green techniques in their businesses, the greater the impact on saving the environment and the planet."

The Picards started their company in 1992 and began focusing on sustainable practices in 2002, including looking at design and landscape from an ecological standpoint.

"We attempt to take systems that are observed in nature and apply them to people's landscapes," Patrick Picard said.

"We do not use pesticides that are toxic and use natural methods for pest control and weed management," Heather Picard said. "We incorporate edible plants into the landscape so people utilize land for food and use drought-tolerant plants and native plants that do well in this climate."

At the financial management company Wealth Plus, president Alexandra Cock offers green investment opportunities to clients.

"We do research and make available investments in alternative energy, water and socially-sustainable companies both locally and internationally," Cock said. "We work to provide funding for small commercial businesses who want to install solar panels."

Design Communications - a marketing, advertising and communication agency - works to help clients thrive economically in the context of sustainability.

Owner Kiki La Porta's clients include Tamalpais Bank, the Marin Municipal Water District and the Marin County Visitors Bureau.

"For all those organizations, I apply green standards having to do with their marketing positioning as well as the way we conduct our business with them," La Porta said. "For example with the visitors bureau it is important to help generate tourist visits to Marin but we try to suggest those visits take place not at peak times so there is less impact on traffic, energy and natural resources."