

BUSINESS

BRING's Re:think program helps local businesses go green



1/5 – Vice President of Cafe Yumm! Edward Gerdes holds up the Re:think Business award from BRING Recycling, which is awarded to businesses that find ways to use recycled and repurposed materials to make their establishment more green and energy efficient. Cafe Yumm! uses solar panels, offers electric car charging stations, uses recycled materials for its tables, walls, and floors, and has LED lights at its location on Broadway in Eugene. (Mary Jane Schulte/The Register-Guard)

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Charlie Tilt, co-owner of Hummingbird Wholesale, first thought that participating in local nonprofit BRING Recycling's business certification program would not be very fruitful.

"To be honest, we didn't really think we were going to get anything out of it," Tilt said.

Human resources manager Kristie Steele said that sustainability is already ingrained in Hummingbird's practices — the store delivers to local customers via bicycle, for example, and customers receive a deposit when they return large containers that employees wash and reuse.

“It works really well because, especially for those larger containers,” Steele said, “They would otherwise be recycled, which would take ... a lot more energy and resources than it does to transport them back empty and wash them.”

But despite their long-standing — and deeply held — environmental focus, Tilt said that BRING Recycling still found ways for his business to improve.

“We felt like we were already thoroughly evaluating those things. But it turned out we didn’t know all of what we didn’t know,” Tilt said, laughing.



2/5 – Bring Recycling awarded Cafe Yumm! with their Re:Think Business award for businesses that use recycled and repurposed materials to make their business more green and energy efficient. Cafe Yumm! offers solar panel electric car charging stations, uses recycled materials on their tables, floors, and walls, and has LED lights at their location on Broadway in Eugene. (Mary Jane Schulte/The Register-Guard)

Program’s beginnings

Hummingbird Wholesale is one of more than 90 local businesses that have become RE:think Business-certified by BRING. The nonprofit organization started the program as part of its mission to help businesses move toward sustainable business practices.

Founded in 1971, BRING provides information and training in conservation to schools as well as businesses.

Angie Marzano, director of the RE:think Business program, said it was started by BRING's current executive director, Carolyn Stein, when she was still the organization's education coordinator.

Stein saw a need for one-on-one individualized consulting for businesses who wanted to look at their environmental impact, Marzano said, and the result was RE:think, which began in 2007.

The program is currently funded by multiple agencies, including the city of Eugene, Lane County and Eugene Water and Electricity Board, Marzano said.

The RE:think program looks at a company's waste stream, waste prevention, its record of buying recycled-content products, energy and water conservation, and waste and storm water management options.



3/5 – Cafe Yumm! employees Macy McLaughlin (left), Melissa Beck (middle), and Megan Jessup-Varnum (right) hold up the Re:Think Business award from Bring Recycling for being a green business. Cafe Yumm! on Broadway in Eugene offers solar panel electric car charging stations, uses recycled and repurposed materials, and has LED lights throughout the establishment. (Mary Jane Schulte/The Register-Guard)

BRING then gives business owners recommendations on what they can do to improve, and become RE:think certified.

Companies that successfully complete the program receive a RE:think Business award, made from recycled bicycle parts from the Center for Appropriate Transport.

Tilt said the input he received from Stein was valuable because it literally made him rethink his business practices, seeing things he might not have otherwise noticed.

“It was really helpful to have that third party perspective,” Tilt said, because it made him take a look at things in his business that he’d gotten used to, and didn’t really notice anymore, and realize what’s unique about his business and what might need changing.

“Sustainability is not a destination, it’s a journey,” Steele said. “Having somebody else there to help look at the map and point out new roads is invaluable.”



4/5 – Cafe Yumm! was awarded the Re:Think Business award from Bring Recycling for its efforts in running a green and energy efficient business. Cafe Yumm! on Broadway in Eugene offers solar panel electric car charging stations, uses recycled and repurposed materials, and uses LED lights throughout the establishment. (Mary Jane Schulte/The Register-Guard)

Accessible suggestions

Hummingbird’s Steele said the input the company received from BRING in 2011 as useful because it was doable.

“People might be afraid to (use the RE:think program) because they think they’re going to get this long laundry list of things they don’t have time to deal with, or that seem too big and scary to undertake,” Steele said. “But that wasn’t what happened.”

Steele said the store received a list of recommendations ranging from simple to more involved tasks, but all were manageable and valuable.

“It’s very accessible. Anybody can do this and take immediate action,” Steele said.

For example, one recommendation BRING made was to find a better printing source, Tilt said. But it didn’t just stop with a recommendation, she said.

The nonprofit organization helped Hummingbird find a green printing company to work with, which saved Hummingbird valuable time.

“It’s a tremendous amount of work on top of simply getting the goods to provide the service,” Tilt said. “Here’s someone who does that all the time for a variety of businesses and can probably help us spend our time better by directing us to three companies instead of a dozen.”

Tilt and his wife Julie co-own the building that houses Hummingbird Wholesale. He is so sold on RE:think he said, that he now requires all his tenants to complete the certification program as well.

93 certified

A total of 225 businesses have sought help from the RE:think program since it began. Of these, 93 have completed the requirements to become certified and receive the RE:think Business Award, Marzano said, most recently, the Laughing Crow Salon, which only recently opened in downtown Eugene.

The RE:think program and other resources provided by BRING are free to businesses throughout Lane County, Marzano said.

In addition to the RE:think program, BRING also provides shorter-term programs and resources such as staff training and presentations as well as marketing materials.

And companies can take part in the RE:think program without committing to becoming certified, Marzano said, “(Sometimes) this was just a way for them to get an idea of where their baseline operations lie.”

BRING tracks the results of RE:think in an annual “impact report,” and in the 2014-2015 report BRING said that recycling increased by 14 percent among certified businesses, and that waste prevention actions increased by 10 percent.

Tim Boyden, owner of Out on a Limb gallery in Eugene, said that his business was certified in 2014.

Boyden said he works constantly to find ways to limit his business’ impact on the environment, from the type of art he displays on down to such details as the type of lights he used.

He has many pieces of repurposed art in his gallery, including ones that use materials that have been thrown away, Boyden said. “I would gather things on the street that (students) would toss, broken chairs and tables.”

BRING was able to help Boyden find other ways to be environmentally friendly, including replacing fluorescent lights and using paper products containing more recycled content.

Boyden displays his RE:think award in his gallery, which, in turn, helps promote the program. Some customers and local business owners have asked him about it, he said.



5/5 – Cafe Yumm! was awarded the Re:Think Business award from Bring Recycling for using recycled materials and energy efficient methods. Cafe Yumm!'s Broadway location in Eugene offers solar panel electric car charging stations, uses recycled and repurposed materials, and has LED lights throughout the establishment. (Mary Jane Schulte/The Register-Guard)

Customer supported

Cafe Yumm! was the third business to receive the RE:think award after going through the program in 2010.

Vice President Ed Gerdes said BRING's recommendations for the company included ways to reduce the use of pesticides, purchasing process-chlorine free paper products, tracking energy costs and providing employee incentives to carpool.

Gerdes said that Cafe Yumm! made a number of changes after going through the program, from negotiating a clause in property leases that forbids the use of any poison in landscaping to changing register receipt paper to process-chlorine free paper.

To address energy costs, Cafe Yumm! began tracking solar power generated at the Cafe Yumm! On Broadway. The company also participates in EWEB's wind power initiative.

The Cafe Yumm! location in downtown Portland also gives free parking passes to employees who carpool.

"Our team members take great pride in knowing that they are a part of the company's attempt to create a sustainable business and eliminate the environmental footprint so that we are at a zero (or) negative impact," Gerdes said.

This commitment to environmentally friendly practices resonates with today's consumers, Gerdes said, a strong incentive for companies to get on board with them.

"This whole idea of becoming more sustainable will be driven by the consumers, who begin making choices to support companies who are minimizing their environmental impact, Gerdes said.

Tilt agreed, saying, "When you see organic Cheerios on the shelf, something has shifted. (Businesses) are seeing that the consumer is identifying certain things as being of value to them."

Tilt said that businesses' bottom lines also benefit in other ways from adopting sustainable behaviors — like recycling materials instead of paying to haul them away, or using less electricity

"The beautiful thing about the RE:think program is that you learn that it is actually cost-saving," Tilt said. "So everybody's winning."

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"It's very accessible. Anybody can do this and take immediate action."

— Kristie Steele, Hummingbird Wholesale, on BRING's Re:think program that helps local businesses become more environmentally responsible