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UWS undertakes green revolution

[Maria Lockwood](#) Superior Telegram
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A revolution is underway at the University of Wisconsin-Superior and it's visible in the construction of tall buildings, narrower margins on class reports, the lack of Styrofoam cups and hopping on a bus.

"UW-Superior is going green," said Tom Fennessey, director of facilities management.

And, said campus sustainability coordinator Janice Crede, "We need everybody. Everything we do can make this better."



A Viands Service Manager Chris Wines picks out a salad sealed in biodegradable corn packaging from a cooler in Rothwell Student Center on the UWS campus. They may look like plastic, but the clear cups and packages A Viands Food Service uses are made of corn fiber. Disposable forks, knives and spoons, and even the garbage bags provided by A Viands are compostable. (Maria Lockwood/mlackwood@superiorteleg.com)

Last year, Crede began connecting faculty, students and staff to the idea of sustainability — creating a more sustainable world. While it grew from the environmental movement, it includes much more.

"It involves every single department, every single aspect," Crede said. "It's social equity and it's education and it's economics ..."

Scientific information on the health of frogs in a particular area is connected. So is music, which can be a reflection of how people are thinking or a way of changing attitudes.

Facilities

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The most noticeable effort on campus is construction of a new student center, which is being built to the Green Building Council's Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards.

Along with recycled content and regional building materials, the center's roof will literally be green. An 18,000-square-foot plot of soil and water-storing Sedum plants will be built into the roof.

The plants will insulate the building, clean the air and capture rainfall, Fennessey said. Excess moisture will drip into a rain garden below, where it will slowly be released. The vegetated roof will decrease the university's stormwater runoff and last up to three times as long as a regular roof, Fennessey said.

Existing buildings are also part of sustainability efforts.

"Last year through conservation alone the campus reduced energy use by six percent," Crede said.

In addition, changes have been made to how buildings are maintained.

"We've actually changed some cleaning processes," said Frank Andrews, UWS custodial supervisor. The university has purchased machines that use less chemicals and worked to replace harsh cleaners with green seal products, which are safer for the environment.

The upfront cost for the green seal products may be more, Andrews said, but they usually last longer.

"Here at the campus the best thing is we're trying to be good stewards of the public dollar," Andrews said, while at the same time being good stewards of the environment.

For example, a summer project at Wessman Arena, the Health & Wellness Center and Mertz Morterelli Field House will replace current lighting with energy-efficient fluorescent lighting.

"Not only will it save energy, it will enhance lighting," Fennessey said.

Food and fuel

When UWS' seven-year food service contract came up for renewal last year, Crede saw an opportunity to expel Styrofoam from the campus. The contract was revamped to require that renewable products be used in its place. In addition, utilization of locally or regionally grown food was added into the contract.

A'Viands Food and Services Management, a Twin Cities-based company, delivered.

"Any paper product we use is biodegradable," said Dave Turska, A'Viands food service director, and "We try to buy as many things locally as possible."

The company purchases tomatoes and peppers from Bay Produce in Superior and many fruits from Bayfield.

A'viands even added composting. Now, everything that gets thrown into garbage cans in the dining room is transported to the Western Lake Superior Sanitary District compost heap, where it is broken down for reuse. A magnet at the top of each can catches any silverware that may get accidentally tossed.

Turska, Crede and Andrews are on the campus Early Adopters team, which is focused on sustainability in the Twin Ports.

“It teaches us how to make good decisions and make businesses sustainable,” Turska said. “It’s helping us do things smarter.”

Meanwhile, less gas is being guzzled due to a partnership with the Duluth Transit Authority. In August of 2007, UWS joined the DTA’s U-Pass program. Students and staff ride the bus anywhere for free.

“Just show your ID,” Crede said.

The program has been gaining in popularity, according to numbers provided by Jim Heilig, director of administration for the DTA. From September to December 2007, the DTA provided 6,624 rides to UWS staff and students. That number rose to 9,500 for the same months in 2008.

Class connections

Having a sustainability office on campus makes sense, Crede said.

“In terms of energy reduction, we can be leaders,” she said. “Also in terms of teachers, we can be leaders.”

Since the first Campus Teach-In on sustainability in 2007, teachers have latched onto the idea.

English teacher Yvonne Rutford has embraced the concept. In her business writing course, she requires students to undertake a research project on an aspect of sustainability. The class spends time discussing the basics and background of sustainability, and the students each conduct research on a particular sustainability topic.

“Students, particularly young people (the “next generation”), will not be able to live out their lifetime on this earth without considering and addressing sustainability issues; it’s not an option,” Rutford said. “The more awareness and education provided on these topics, the better able people will be to make good choices for a sustainable future.”

For communications major Ruth Anderson, a week-long seminar beside Pigeon Lake opened her eyes to sustainability.

“It’s like some type of magical thing just happens,” she said.

With no cars, computers, iPods or cell phones, participants in the Leadership in Sustainability seminar reconnected with the natural world around them. They examined the local ecology and discussed what sustainability is and how they could make a difference.

“You learn a lot,” Anderson said, and seeds were planted.

To date, two summer seminars have been held. Each time, students have acted on what they learned.

One participant initiated a recycling program at his workplace. Another has begun lobbying for double-sided printers on campus. Anderson is helping launch a newsletter on sustainability at UWS.

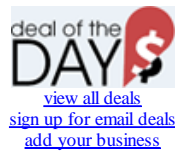
“We got people going,” Crede said, and they are still bringing their message of sustainability to the community.

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Betty Kleutsch, who works in the sandwich deli for A'Viands Food Service on the University of Wisconsin-Superior campus, slices a Bay Produce tomato for sandwiches. A'Viands incorporates the Superior-grown tomatoes, Alakef coffee from Duluth and fruit from Bayfield into menus to promote sustainability. (Maria Lockwood/mlockwood@superiortelegam.com)



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