

Monroe Street Green - A Model for Green Business

By John Imes

Main Street businesses define our culture, no matter the size of the town. They are staples of each community serving as leaders, whether for responsible business practices, fair prices or customer service. We want these businesses to do well because of their connection to the community and to each of us.

Main Street businesses are also beginning to make a commitment to more sustainable business practices. “Main Street Green” is an innovative program focused on cultivating, educating, and supporting those businesses and commercial districts that will serve as models for more sustainable development.

Monroe Street is the state’s first business district to utilize stewardship tools and innovative best practices developed by WEI (Wisconsin Environmental Initiative). The Monroe Street Green program is being implemented in conjunction with the Monroe Street Merchants Association and 26 businesses representing retail, food and beverage, and service establishments. These leading “ecopreneurs” are implementing innovative best practices to benefit the community and environment in many ways.

Monroe Street Green businesses work with WEI to receive the support they need to establish baseline goals, benchmark their progress and identify best practices in sustainability. Businesses in the program must meet the requirements of the Monroe Street Green Checklist. This serves as a stewardship tool to set goals relating to eight major environmental topic areas. Participating businesses will be able to:

- Establish a baseline of their current energy, solid waste, water consumption and storm water impacts.
- Pursue energy efficiency goals.
- Incorporate water-saving strategies.
- Implement best practices in landscaping and related efforts to reduce storm water run-off.
- Shift their purchasing practices to more local and environmentally responsible choices.
- Educate their customers, employees and the public about actions they can take to reduce their environmental impact.

“Monroe Street is already being “green” by offering local shops, boutiques and restaurants that are located within walking and biking distance, or reached by public transportation,” said Orange Schroeder, co-owner of Orange Tree Imports and head of the Monroe Street Merchants Association. “We also want to show that our shops, restaurants and other businesses are leaders in environmentally responsible business practices.”

As a green business district, some have advocated that the upcoming Monroe Street reconstruction project include green infrastructure and green development strategies. A redesign offered by Sustainability Leadership students at Edgewood College includes green roofs, bioretention swales, permeable pavement and other amenities along a Monroe "Green" Street corridor to create an even more pedestrian-friendly and vibrant shopping destination.

We can buy local and act local everyday by supporting Main Street Green businesses that make a stronger commitment to improving environmental performance. On our Main Street, small businesses showcase the very best of communities across Wisconsin.

John Imes is executive director for Wisconsin Environmental Initiative and co-owner of the Arbor House Inn located on Monroe Street. For more on Main Street Green, please visit <http://www.weigogreener.org/>

Monroe Street Green Participants:

Alvarado Real Estate Group
Arbor House, An Environmental Inn
Art Gecko
Bluephies
Brasserie V
Full Circle Natural Medicine
HAIR
HotelRED
J. Kinney Florist
Jacs Dining & Tap House
Karner Blue Candle & Supply
Madison Environmental Group
Mallatt's Pharmacy
Maurie's Fine Chocolates
Monroe Street Family Dental
Monroe Street Framing
Mystery to Me
New Orleans Take-Out
Orange Tree Imports
Paragon Video and Stereo
Pizza Brutta
Restaino & Associates Realtors
SERRV
The Wine and Hop Shop
UW Credit Union
Wingra Boats