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Sustainable Practices Build ‘Triple Bottom Line’ in Business

By Celerah Hewes-Rutledge, Chief Operating Officer, New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce

Renee Frank is perfectly positioned to demonstrate that sustainable practices can improve a business’s bottom line and its “upper line” — its appeal to customers who want to do business with green companies.

Frank is a real estate agent and a certified “ecobroker” — the leader of Steinborn and Associates’ Smart Living Team and a founding member of the Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce.

Her job is to help clients choose wisely where and how they’ll live in a new home. Her mission is to help other entrepreneurs realize how quickly they’ll recover the costs of incorporating energy-efficient and sustainable features and practices by generating savings and attracting customers.



All About Orientation

“Sustainability in real estate means we have to be aware of trends and technology and connect people to resources” that help them live more efficiently in their homes, Frank said.

Besides informing buyers which local builders exceed minimum standards of energy efficiency in construction, she helps them weigh the hidden costs of homeownership. “The costs of living in a home are not just the mortgage, taxes and insurance but the energy costs,” she said, and transportation costs associated with getting to and from work and the places where people shop or play.

In real estate, “going green” also means conducting your business with the consciousness of a conservationist. For Frank, that meant buying a hybrid electric car and moving toward an all-electronic office.

As a Green Chamber member, Frank educates other businesses about the “triple bottom line,” an accounting framework based on the “three pillars of sustainability” — people, planet, and profits. “Businesses are more driven by economics,” she said, “so we help them see they can improve the bottom line by adopting sustainability principles. You can also benefit the top line — how much business you can draw in — as more and more consumers want to do business with businesses that follow sustainable practices.”

Where To Start

Many businesses worry where to begin incorporating green principles into their operations.

Frank recommends starting with an energy audit, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation agrees, saying this review can pay for itself within a year in energy savings. (Homeowners can likewise hire a certified Home Energy Rating System professional to audit any home they want to buy.)

Businesses can start small if they don't have the capital to pay for costly features such as a solar array or wind turbine or to build a sustainable building from scratch — or if they rent space or occupy an older building that needs significant retrofitting. Most businesses can replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescent lights, use xeric landscaping or rainwater catchment for irrigation or install double-paned windows, low flow toilets and motion detector lights in intermittently used rooms.

The Small Business Administration offers loans to help businesses make such improvements, and some improvements entitle the business owner to tax credits. Many utilities offer incentives and advice to businesses that want to get started with savings.

For more ideas about resources, call the New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce at 505-244-3700 or visit nmgreenchamber.com.

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