

'Green' is good for environment and business

By Scott Cowger

Green power, green vacations, green weddings, green "whatever." What's this all about? Being "green" has become very fashionable lately, but green is much more than being "cool."

Businesses across Maine are initiating green practices, and this means doing things that are good for the environment and good for the planet. It also happens that these green actions are also good for business. Many individuals want to minimize their impact on the environment and they will often choose a "green" business when they have a choice.

The most important green practice is reducing energy use or relying on clean, renewable energy. Many individuals as well as businesses have a desire to minimize their carbon "footprint," or the amount of carbon dioxide that they are responsible for emitting into the air. Carbon dioxide is the largest component of greenhouse gases, and high amounts of man-made greenhouse gases are a major cause of global climate change. Some businesses are going green by purchasing renewable energy credits, or RECs, from non-polluting energy sources so that they may claim to be non-polluting themselves. Others are making investments that directly generate renewable energy them-



In December 2006, Maple Hill Farm Bed and Breakfast in Hallowell installed the largest solar energy array in Maine, shown here, on the roof of the Gathering Place function room at the inn. PHOTO COURTESY MAPLE HILL FARM BED AND BREAKFAST

selves, in areas such as solar, wind, or co-generation facilities.

At the Maple Hill Farm Inn in Hallowell, the inn has had a long-standing personal commitment to minimizing its environmental impact. In

2003 they installed a 10 kilowatt electrical-generating wind turbine on a 100-foot-tall tower, and it has been generating part of the inn's power demand without any pollution ever since.

In December 2006, the inn made a major

commitment to renewable energy by installing the largest solar energy array in Maine on the roof of the Gathering Place function room at the inn. This array has 126 photovoltaic panels that generate up to 15 kilowatts of electricity plus 202 evacuated tube collectors that heat up most of the inn's domestic hot water needs. Installing renewable energy systems requires a major up-front investment, but will provide pollution-free energy at virtually no additional cost for many years.

Another way businesses are being green is by reducing solid waste and by using recycled products as much as possible. Landfills are filling up, and the geologic conditions (as well as the political realities) in Maine make it difficult to site any new facilities. Incineration of trash, especially some plastics, can add dioxins and other toxins like mercury into our air. Simple practices such as using recycled paper and recycling office paper have been around for a while, but less waste can be generated by anyone with a little extra effort. We can all take our reusable bags when we go shopping and be green by keeping plastic bags out of the trash.

At Maple Hill Farm, guest room amenities are provided in shower-mounted bulk dispensers rather than individual single-use bot-

• MAPLE HILL Page 23

• MAPLE HILL from page 19

ties. The customer is able to use what he or she wants, with no wasteful bottling and wasted product, and it's easier to get that shampoo or conditioner from a pump than a tiny plastic bottle.

An often overlooked part of being green is that of supporting your local economy. The dol-

lars that are spent at local businesses stay in your community and in Maine, and do not flow to entities based far from home. Buying locally supports local farmers, vendors, contractors and artisans and helps build a sense of community, let alone providing environmental benefits that come from minimizing fuel usage by purchasing

products and services that don't have to be trucked-in from far away.

Being green can be very rewarding for us as individual citizens and it can also add meaning when businesses make it part of their core mission. You can show your support for green businesses by patronizing them, and adopt your own

individual practices to become part of the "green" movement.

Scott Cowger is the co-owner of the Maple Hill Farm Inn and Conference Center in Hallowell. Their Web site, which features real-time monitoring of their solar electric system, is www.MapleBB.com.