

Conservation is Conservative

As submitted to The Freeman

By: County Executive Dan Vrakas

Since having the privilege and honor to serve as your County Executive, I have worked with my administration to do business more efficiently through environmentally friendly facility improvements and operational changes that save real, ongoing tax dollars. And, in just a few short years, we have reaped significant benefits from our conservation efforts.

As both a conservative and a bachelors degree holder in biology from UW-Stevens Point, I believe that preserving our natural resources is critical to our success locally, nationally, and across the globe. Ultimately, a healthier environment benefits all of us, which is why conservation is something that I practice in both my personal and professional life and work hard to promote in the workplace.

Along with using a common sense based approach to implement green projects, Waukesha County government applies sound business analysis, identifies returns on investment, and measures its performance with any green initiative that we undertake. Take recycling for example, a few weeks ago, the County returned \$879,000 to 25 partnering municipalities for participating in a recycling program and having their recyclables delivered to the County's Material Recycling Facility. This impressive, self-sufficient service delivery model operates without tax dollars by leveraging state grant funds received on behalf of participating municipalities and revenue from the sale of recyclables. Since 2001, our partners have received a \$5.3 million return on investment to offset recycling program costs.

Over the past year and a half, the County has installed Light Emitting Diodes or LED's in traffic signals along its renowned comprehensive County Trunk Highway system. Initially, this small change in lighting was estimated to save us \$20,000 in electricity costs annually, but after fully implemented, it pleases me to share with you that the project has resulted in an ongoing savings of \$60,000 a year. This goes to show you that something as simple as a change in the light bulbs we use can have a dramatic impact on energy costs and the savings that can be incurred with such modifications.

Because of the successes achieved in that undertaking, we then replaced existing metal halide lighting with linear florescent lighting at the County's two ice arenas to conserve energy and reduce operating costs in 2007. Not only does this investment brighten each facility, but it is estimated to save County taxpayers \$10,000 in energy costs per calendar year with a project payback in less that four years. Plus, we repaved the airport's north-south runway by milling the existing pavement and mixing it with recycled fly ash from coal plants, which was then graded and compacted to create a new, stronger base material. Remarkably, this cutting edge paving process saved the County \$50,000 in project costs. In addition, we are using recycled asphalt when repaving or rebuilding highways; designing, producing and installing recycled plastic signs; coordinating with the City of Waukesha Water Utility on water conservation practices; recycling the

majority of property demolition and construction debris; and setting new mining industry standards by reclaiming a gravel pit with yard waste from 13 partnering municipalities.

And, our green focused business philosophy has not stopped there. As we progressed into the new year, the County utilized a new salt pre-wetting process on our winter roads that allowed for a more effective product application and less salt usage, which is better for the environment in the end. We will also study and invest in projects this year that save future annual utility costs, such as upgrading lighting and plumbing fixtures, replacing manual lighting switches with occupancy sensors, and transitioning to more efficient boilers in our 50 year old Courthouse.

Sustainability is all about ensuring that economic growth and development today does not jeopardize the ability of future generations to meet their needs. As Waukesha County government continues its conservation-minded efforts, our initiative sets a strategy to attain and maintain a place of leadership in environmental stewardship and efficiency at our facilities, in our operations, and in the larger community of which we are a part. I look forward to working on this plan and extending opportunities to residents and municipalities that would like to partner with us on it.

In closing, I feel that it is important to note that Waukesha County's team of dedicated professionals embraced this endeavor before it was in to be green. On behalf of the 380-some-thousand people that call Waukesha County home, I would like to thank our County staff for helping us save tax dollars by conserving resources. I am extremely appreciative and proud of your desire to ensure that Waukesha County remains an innovative leader across public and private sectors.

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