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Downtown businesses foster eco-conscious mindset

*By Meredith Thorn
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Phil Kruthoff gives food waste to the student garden at University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. The co-owner of The Other Side also tries to provide customers with a feast of produce and products from local farmers, including eggs and meat.

Mary McComb sells 100 percent recycled, handmade, soy-based inked wedding invitations at the Paper Doll Stationery Boutique downtown.

Andi Oppermann encourages her customers at The Companion Shop to bring in their own bags for their purchases -- and those who do get entered into a quarterly drawing for \$25 worth of merchandise.

With green business practices on the minds of business owners and consumers, these downtown businesses have included practices with an eco-conscious mindset.

Many of McComb's products are recyclable, and her business provides paper bags made of recycled industrial waste for purchases. She also employs a simple practice -- asking customers if they would like a bag, cutting down on the number used.

Oppermann's business sells pet toys made in the United States out of recycled materials, including plastic bottles.

Kruthoff also focuses on local produce and products to obtain eco-sustainability when he can.

He incorporates local products year-round into his soups and breakfast.

"I'm getting it probably two days after they pull it from the ground or pluck it from a tree," he said. "I get to meet the farmers."

Other downtown business owners say their companies are a combination of environmental consciousness and an inherently eco-friendly atmosphere.

"We do not have high overhead for electrical appliances," said Cheryl Meltzer, co-owner of Stevens Point Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine LLC.

Meltzer said treatments at the facility are very low-tech, and a green mentality is inherent to the practice of Chinese medicine, which also encourages an eco-friendly lifestyle.

Some downtown business are banding together with eco-friendly practices.

Stevens Point Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine LLC, The Companion Shop and Paper Doll are three of nine businesses that sell Prairie Chicken bags, reusable totes that benefit the Prairie Chicken Festival.

McComb said the proximity of businesses downtown also means more people are walking and biking between stores, something that can't be done at other shopping centers.

"It's something to work toward and be aware of," she said. "It's only good for business."
