



Dyersville - When businesses go green.

From left, quality control manager Matt Goss and human resources director Kristie McCarthy stand in the warehouse at EIMCO that is outfitted with LEDs providing "twice as much light for half as much money," said McCarthy.

Business owners concerned about their companies' impact on the environment, and who want to save on energy costs, are turning to the Petal Project for guidance.

The Petal Project began in 2009 to encourage businesses to go green. The Iowa Economic Development Authority, through the Eastern Central Intergovernmental Association, funds the project. Each petal focuses on different aspects of sustainability, and participating businesses fulfill requirements to earn each petal. The five petals include staff education, waste reduction, pollution prevention, energy conservation and water conservation.

Two local businesses, East Iowa Machine Company (EIMCo) in Farley and Physical Therapy Solutions in Dyersville are fully Petal-certified.

When PT Solutions owner Jason Putz moved his growing business to a new building last year, he decided to participate in the Petal Project.

"We thought we could incorporate all those benefits into the building right away, rather than retrofit it," he said.

Putz said he is seeing savings. PT Solutions is using less water due to aerators on faucets. His energy bills are lower with an efficient furnace and water heater and with a switch to LED lights.

Putz is also saving money by going paperless as much as possible, relying on computerized records and installing hand driers in bathrooms.

Another benefit Putz sees to participating in the program is the education it provided his staff and his children about recycling and energy conservation.

To get his furnace and hot water heater to a Petal-certified efficiency level was costly up front, and the investment will not show a return in energy savings for seven or eight years, he said. "But it's my way of paying it forward," he said. "Hopefully, we will leave this place in better shape than we found it."

When EIMCo CEO Rick Hoffman heard about the Petal Project in 2013, he sent employees Kristie McCarthy and Matt Goss to a seminar offered by the Greater Dubuque Development Corporation. Two months later, his company had earned all five petals.

A year earlier, EIMCo had added 50,000 square feet and had already implemented many energy savings. Becoming part of the Petal Project was fairly easy for the company, said Goss, as the company had already met many requirements.

The Petal Project requires a business to switch to T8 or T5 light bulbs. McCarthy said they already had T5s that weren't efficient enough, so they upgraded to LEDs. According to McCarthy, savings were immediate. "We now get twice the light for half the price," she said.

Goss said that low-flow aerators in sinks control the amount of water used.

EIMCo has a computerized system that controls room temperatures based on occupancy detectors. The temperature is also regulated according to employee work patterns.

McCarthy said she suspects a lot of businesses don't know about the Petal Project. She also said that Petal Project criteria might be daunting for some businesses starting from scratch.

EIMCo provides containers for employees who want to recycle trash, ink cartridges, old cell phones or dead batteries from home.

As an environmental steward outside his business as well, Putz had been trying to get a recycling container in Dyersville for rural residents who do not have curbside service. He said he was happy to see that the Dubuque Metropolitan Solid Waste Agency has placed a red recycling container behind Theisen's. He hopes the word gets out to the farming community.

Putz said he had been thinking green since college. "It doesn't take a whole lot of work," he said. "It's more a matter of being knowledgeable enough to know what to do." (Dyersville Commercial 10-28-15)