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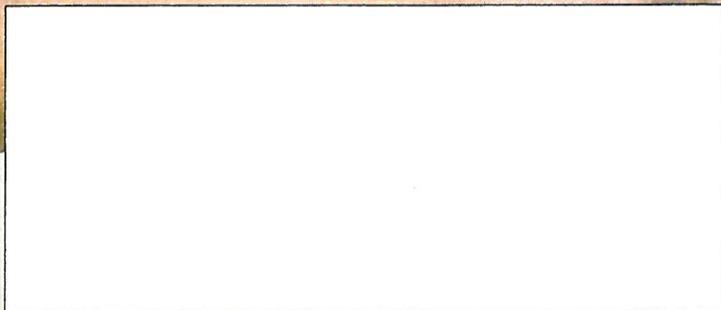


SUSTAINONOMICS

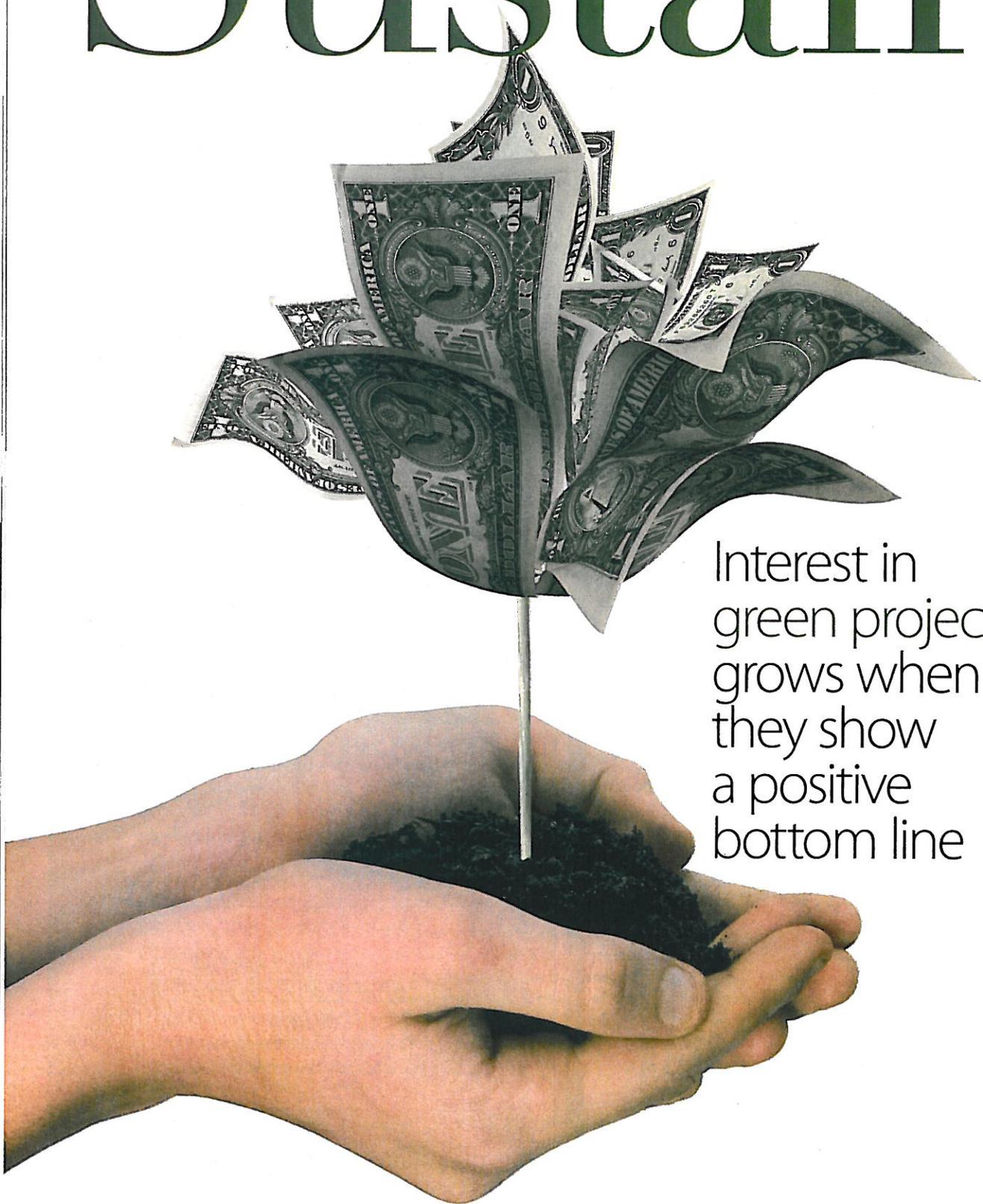
Interest in green projects grows when they show a positive bottom line



Locals change operations to cope with hard times



Sustainable



Interest in green projects grows when they show a positive bottom line

By Robert Barkin

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Decades ago, when Roy Gold became aware of the importance of environmentalism at the first Earth Day celebration, people considered him a “tree hugger” and dismissed his passion for preserving natural resources as the quixotic campaign of a young college graduate. Today, as a businessman and city councilmember in Coral Springs, Fla., Gold’s motivation in his quest for sustainability has changed from the fire of youthful passion to a hard-eyed pragmatism driven as much by dollars and cents as the need for preserving the planet’s ecology.

“This is not based on ‘Let’s help the planet,’” Gold says about his city’s initiatives. “It’s based on economics. We can reduce the use of energy and costs. We can reduce the waste of water and reduce costs. People are looking at the bottom line.”

Communities across the country are studying more closely the prospect of improving their financial well-being as a result of reducing their consumption of energy and water, or as Mayor Mary Hamman-Roland of Apple Valley, Minn., puts it, “Green keeps the green in your pocket.”

THE ENDURANCE TEST

Sustainability is roughly defined as the capacity of a community to endure through the wise use of environmental resources and, in particular, non-fossil-based energy resources, such as solar and wind power. According to the United Nations Human Development Index, humans are using 130 percent of the Earth’s currently sustainable biophysical resources, which experts argue cannot continue much longer. Moreover, fossil fuel use has raised carbon dioxide — a primary cause of global warming — to the highest level in 650,000 years and is projected to more than double in the next 50 years without intervention.

The United States is considered a primary user of the earth’s resources. According to the Global Footprint Network, if every global inhabitant consumed at the rate of United States residents, the earth would need five times the existing biophysical resources it now possesses. Currently, fossil fuels provide more than 85 percent of all energy consumed in the United States, according to the U.S. Department of Energy.

“Efficiency, diversity, connectivity and restoration,” says Craig Malin, city manager in Davenport, Iowa, and liaison between the natural resource committees of the National League of Cities (NLC) and the International City/County Management Association. “In a word, that’s sustainability.”

NEW GREEN TO GO GREEN

In April, NLC held its first Green Cities conference in Portland, Ore., and attracted a standing-room-only crowd of 750 officials who were interested in a three-day session focused on fostering sustainability in their communities. “It



was Sustainability 101,” says Tammy Zborel, NLC’s senior associate for sustainability programs. “The conference showed members the basics to get started, and we learned that members want even more.”

Now, NLC is developing an online sustainability resource center to provide communities tools to implement sustainability programs, including best practices, links to information Web sites and tips for finding potential partners to share the cost. “We’re going to show the long-term and big-picture benefits,” Zborel says.

Some of the impetus for the interest in sustainability comes from recent funding for new projects from power companies, the federal government and the states. In the federal stimulus program, \$3.2 billion is set aside through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grants (EECBG) Program to assist states and local governments in managing energy efficiency and conservation projects.



The Apple Valley, Minn., Municipal Center was designed in 2001 following LEED standards.

Photo by Brian Droegge

The programs are geared to:

- Reduce fossil fuel emissions;
- Reduce total energy use;
- Improve energy efficiency in the transportation, building and other sectors; and
- Create and retain jobs.

Besides funding support, though, interest in sustainability is growing as more local programs are completed

that show substantial energy and cost savings. In Cleveland, for example, officials in a Division of Water treatment plant found that they could shut down a dehumidification plant with no adverse effects and save \$160,000 over two years.

Cleveland’s recycling program saved an estimated \$1 million over two years and reduced landfill waste by 10 percent. And, an energy optimization strategy at the water treatment plants may save another \$200,000. In the small southern city of Fayette, Ark., the community has implemented an energy management program, including programmable thermostats and energy audits, which has saved \$400,000 in its first year.

WORK IN PROGRESS

Beyond cost savings gained from energy efficiency improvements, however, a growing number of communities are turning sustainability initiatives into economic engines. Palo Alto, Calif., a city in the Silicon Valley and hotbed of technological research, has become a leader in stretching sustainable projects beyond cost savers into economic generators. “We see green technology as the next frontier of the economy,” says Mayor Peter Drekmeyer.

He points to the city’s operation of its municipal gas, water and electric utilities as a draw for economic development. With 23 percent of its power generated by renewable sources and another 50 percent from water, the city saves considerably more than

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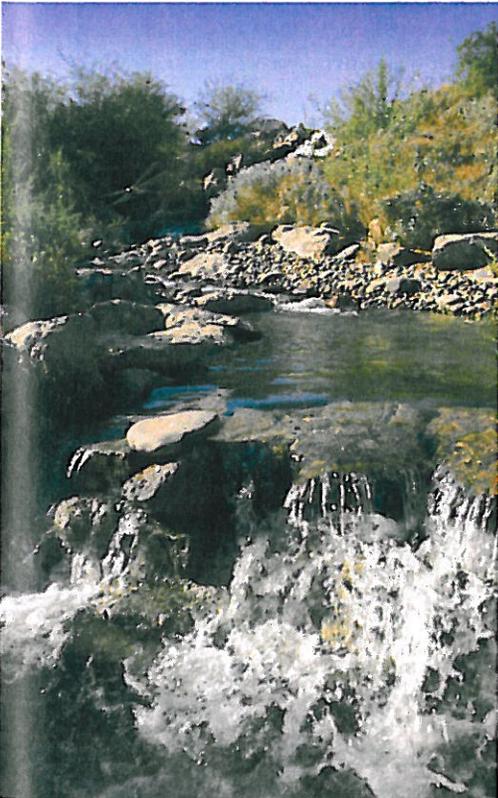
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the rates offered by the local utility. And, Palo Alto can pass those rates on to businesses, along with the aura of being environmentally conscious, he says. "We have an image as a green city, and business wants that image," Drekmeier says. "The community gets an image as cutting edge, willing to try new things. It attracts business."

Some green projects translate directly into jobs. In Phoenix, a partnership to build a solar generating facility in about 18 months would not only produce 200 megawatts of power, but also employ several hundred workers during construction and a large full-time staff to operate the facility, says Councilmember Claude Mattox.

Phoenix also has cleaned up the Rio Salado dry riverbed that runs through the middle of the city, which had become an eyesore and trash dump, and reclaimed the terrain with natural plants and recreational facilities. At the same time, the city has prepared several commercial sites along its banks for office park developments. "The Rio Salado was once a blight, but



Phoenix has cleaned up the Rio Salado riverbed and created recreational and commercial areas for development.

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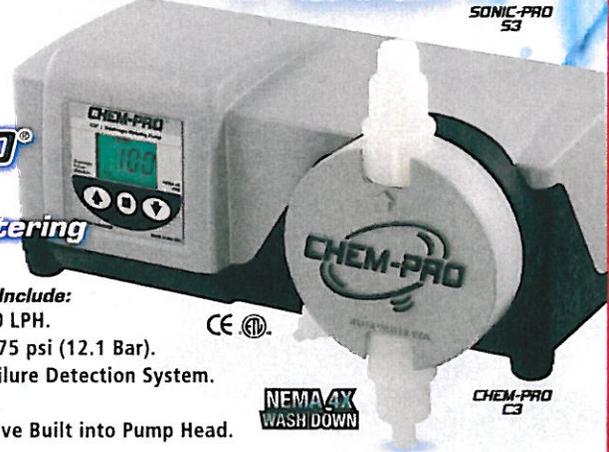


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The rooftop solar panels on one of the Phoenix Convention Center's buildings reduce carbon dioxide pollution by 95 metric tons annually, which is equivalent to producing enough energy to power 12 to 14 homes annually.

now it's a place where business wants to be," Mattox says. "Sustainability and clean industry, if not synonymous, are close first cousins."

Hamann-Roland of Apple Valley also promotes her city, located about 12 miles from Minneapolis, as an "early adopter" of good environmental practices. In 2001, the city had designed its municipal building according to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design standards. But, today, she is just as proud of the economic engine that sustainability has become for the city. "If you take care of your natural resources, they will take care of you," she says.

As an example of that philosophy, she points to the construction of a municipal liquor store last year that was designed according to strict environmental standards. Now, Apple Valley, which controls the sale of liquor within its borders, is pouring the profits from liquor sales into an enterprise fund that has so far contributed \$500,000 toward new parks and recreation facilities. "The quality of life is connected to the enterprise," she says, noting that the city is considering building additional stores that would meet "green standards" with a six- to eight-year payback through energy conservation. "We are saving money in the long haul," she says.

Because Apple Valley began largely as a community of farmers and aggregate miners, residents always had a strong connection to the environment, Hamann-Roland says, adding that the sensibility has remained, even as the city has grown and become more commercial. Over time, residents have begun to understand the connection between sustainability and economic development, she says. "We are growing a culture of people who get it, people who live it and see it," she says.

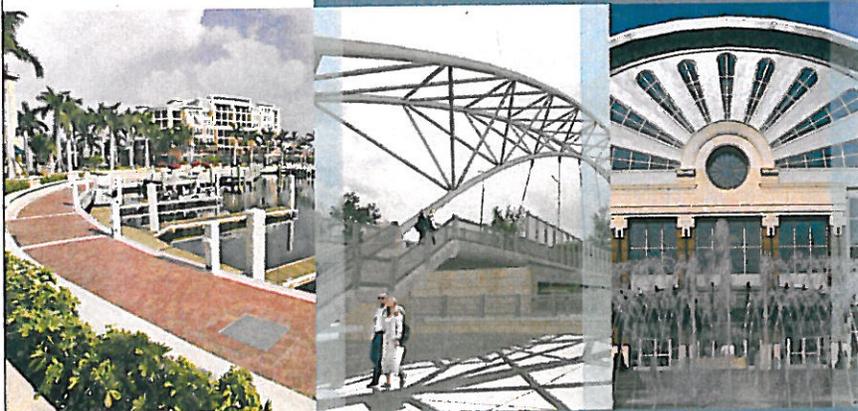
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Coral Springs, Fla., created a \$1 million trust fund to increase the city's tree canopy. Developers contribute to the fund as part of their project fees.

greenhouse gases," he says. "Seventy-five percent of emissions are related to urban activities. Cities have a big part to play."

However, he admits that there is not enough "broad understanding and awareness" among residents about the benefits of sustainability. "Raising awareness is a big effort," he says.

As residents across the country begin to see how sustainability affects their wallets and their community's economic strength, support is growing. "That's what drives this," Gold says. "You have to follow the money. When sustainability creates savings, it shows people this is best for them. They are looking for the financial bent."

— **Robert Barkin** is a Bethesda, Md.-based freelance writer.

WHERE THE MONEY LEADS, PEOPLE FOLLOW

Redlands, Calif., officials have identified 10 areas that the city can address to reduce its carbon emissions — including conservation

of open areas, vehicle emissions and construction design — and they are identifying the potential for economic development in each of them, says Mayor John Harrison. "Cities can be active participants in the reduction of

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