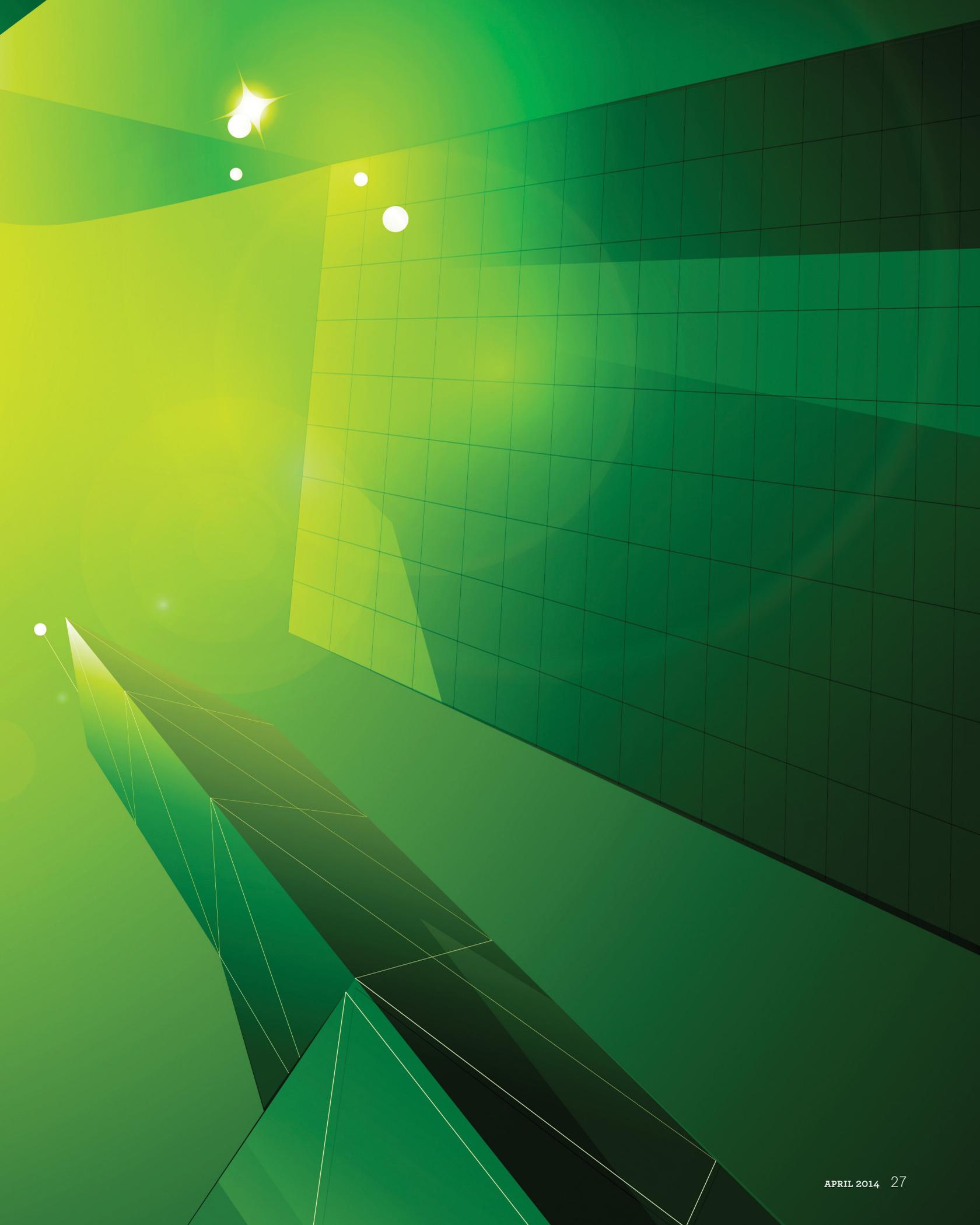


GREEN GIANTS

With concerns continuing to mount over the environment, going green has become a global challenge that we can no longer afford to ignore. New Jersey has been at the forefront of implementing environmentally responsible business initiatives, but there is always room for growth. Here are some ways mid-Jersey's greenest companies have made their footprints smaller, and how you and your business can follow their lead.

by ALLEN KIM



Ed Seliga serves as the chair of the New Jersey chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) and as the vice president and COO of Advanced Solar Products. With decades of experience as a civil and environmental engineer, he is uniquely qualified as an expert on the New Jersey green building movement.

“Ten years ago, when I first joined the board for the New Jersey chapter for the USGBC, it was still regarded as unproven and kind of a new idea,” Seliga says. “People were on the sideline waiting to see, but now major players, major corporations, including major real estate companies,

ment, water efficiency, energy efficiency, material selection, indoor environmental quality, design innovation, and regional priority.

“The LEED program is a very manageable and structured approach to implementing green,” Seliga says. “The advantage of green constructions within the entire real estate world is that there are different versions of LEED for different kinds of sites and buildings. It’s a structured way to accomplish a transformation of the real estate market, reduce our consumption of resources, and, at the same time, produce better work and living environments for the people who are

“If you’re comparing one or two vendors and one vendor is willing to go so far as do the kind of things that benefit not themselves but the environment, you probably want to believe in the company that’s willing to go the extra step to be responsible.”

— Barry Zhang, CEO, Princetel

have adopted this as a standard and as a portfolio management tool.”

The USGBC has experienced incredible growth over the last decade. In the last year alone, more than 10 billion square feet of space has been registered into their Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) system.

The LEED system was developed by the USGBC, and it’s a rating scale used for the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of green buildings. It is broken down into four performance ratings: Certified, Silver, Gold, and Platinum.

Each certification is based on a point system that is determined by site develop-

ing those buildings. Part of the design of LEED is to constantly raise the bar and improve the standards that we’re using. You have to appreciate how poorly a lot of buildings were built and how poorly they function. There’s a tremendous amount of energy that goes to waste.”

Whether or not a company is looking toward the LEED system for guidance, Seliga suggests that companies start by assessing their own, personal situation to create a baseline to work from.

Something as simple as adding up the energy and water bills would be a good place to start. The next logical step would be an energy audit.

“It’s absolutely worthwhile for folks to look at NJCEP.com, the clean energy program website,” Seliga says. “I think most companies still aren’t aware of any of the benefits. For example, it still strikes many people in the commercial setting as being new, that the clean energy program direct install program can pay up to 70 percent on energy-efficient upgrades. That’s a tremendous help. Yet there are millions of dollars of funds that go unused every year just because of a lack of interest. Companies have not really utilized this huge opportunity that we enjoy here in New Jersey.”

THE ECO-ACTIVISTS

Tom Szaky, founder and CEO of TerraCycle, was profiled last year as one of the region’s young, local business leaders of tomorrow. As a dedicated environmentalist, his company focuses on recycling and upcycling products with the goal of eliminating waste. “We’re trying our best to get people to think differently about waste—not just other companies, but consumers, governments, everyone,” Szaky says. “I truly do hope that TerraCycle is inspiring big companies to view sustainability differently and inspiring the next generation of eco-activists.”

TerraCycle makes sure to practice what it preaches, and one look at its office is all the confirmation that you need. In addition to the solar panels covering its roof, energy-efficient HVAC system, and professionally insulated ceilings and walls, its office is made entirely from upcycled products and reused materials. The lobby floor is carpeted with used Astroturf, and walls are made from salvaged wood. Employee

You can reduce your carbon footprint

at the same time as padding your bottom line by doing things such as using energy-efficient computer monitors and lighting, installing Energy Star appliances, and using CFL bulbs.



Up to 70 percent of energy-efficient upgrades

can be paid by the New Jersey Clean Energy Program.



THE LEED SYSTEM

The LEED system was developed by the USGBC. It's a rating system used for the design, construction, operation, and maintenance of green buildings that's broken down into four performance ratings:

- Certified
- Silver
- Gold
- Platinum

Each certification is based on a point system that is determined by site development, water efficiency, energy efficiency, material selection, indoor environmental quality, design innovation, and regional priority.

There are five LEED rating systems that address multiple project types:

- BUILDING DESIGN + CONSTRUCTION
- INTERIOR DESIGN + CONSTRUCTION
- BUILDING OPERATIONS + MAINTENANCE
- NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT
- HOMES

desks are old doors that are propped up on student desks, and they use things such as shampoo bottles, plastic trays, and soda bottles as room dividers.

For many companies, the words “going green” often conjure up images of large projects with equally expensive budgets, but the most obvious, cheap, and easy place to start is often taken for granted and overlooked. “It’s very easy to recycle,” Szaky says. “Aside from it being a good thing environmentally, there are financial and strategic advantages provided by adopting sustainable practices. Consumers are expecting companies to invoke greener practices and are using their wallets to show whether they approve. If you

aren’t taking green initiatives seriously, your competitors are gaining ground.”

SETTING A NEW STANDARD

For Princetel CEO Barry Zhang, he has a very simple mantra that he follows: “Do everything the responsible way,” he says. “That’s our philosophy, and it seems to have worked out well for us.”

The fiber-optics-focused company, whose facility is located in Hamilton, is a beacon for other companies to follow when it comes to going green, and Zhang hopes to set an example for others in adopting green initiatives. Before Zhang took over the space at 2560 E. State Street, the land was deemed to be

a brownfield, which is land that is contaminated. “When I learned that it was a brownfield, a light bulb lit up,” Zhang says. “I just couldn’t stand sitting on top of toxic soil and allow that to keep seeping into the ground water.”

It was an expensive and risky investment, but Zhang went ahead and started talks with the township and the building owner about the space. Using their own money to clean it up, they had about 760 tons of the contaminated soil removed.

“The benefit of doing something like this is the good will,” Zhang says. “People realize what you’ve done and they respect it. If you’re comparing vendors and one is willing to go so far to do the kind of things

New Jersey’s Clean Energy Program

offers significant financial incentives for commercial, industrial, and governmental customers to integrate energy-efficient and renewable technologies into new construction, upgrades, and new cooling and heating equipment installations.



that benefit not themselves but the environment, you probably want to believe in the company that's willing to go the extra step to be responsible."

Zhang didn't stop with simply cleaning up the contaminated soil. "Renewable

able temperature throughout. All the floors are made of 100-percent-recycled materials, and the building uses high-efficiency light bulbs that are programmed and motion-controlled, so energy consumption is minimal.

"For everyone thinking about going green, the way you should remember or think about it is that the environment isn't a short-term issue but a long-term initiative."

— Nat Anderson, CEO, Nothing But Green Living

energy is only part of the sustainable practice that we have here."

Of the energy that Princeton's solar panels produce, the company only consumes about one-third of it. The rest is sold back to the grid. The company also harvests nearly 10,000 gallons of rainwater every year, which is used for flushing toilets and maintaining its landscaping. It brings in fresh air from outside, and everything in the building is insulated, which allows for minimal energy to maintain a comfort-

Princeton's Hamilton facility has not yet been awarded the LEED Gold certificate, but it's waiting for its application to pass through the certification process. And in addition to its impending LEED certificate, it's transitioning to a B corporation—or benefit corporation—which calls for accountability and transparency while putting an emphasis on social and environmental problems. "The only way to compete is through innovation, and social responsibility and innovation go hand in

hand," Zhang says. "You should do what's sustainable as a company but remember that you have a social responsibility."

PAYING IT FORWARD

Based out of Mount Laurel, Nothing But Green Living (NBGL) is dedicated to offering green-certified cleaning services and products. Founded by Ron Timmons, the company opted to take the path less traveled when it comes to going green.

While the focus of green initiatives tends to lean toward sustainability and renewable energy, something as simple as the chemicals used to clean floors often gets overlooked. This is where NBGL steps in.

NBGL offers a unique cleaning service that is completely green, and one of its main focuses is to reduce the use of harmful floor finishes and chemicals in favor of green-certified cleaning products.

"We're bringing new initiatives to the world of cleaning buildings," Timmons says. "You're changing health issues that can impact children and adults."

Timmons' partner, Nat Anderson,



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serves as the chief operating officer of NBGL. It didn't take much to convince him to join forces with Timmons, and he has been a crusader for NBGL ever since. "Being a green initiative, it was just the right thing to do," Anderson says.

The company works with school districts, municipalities, churches, and businesses of all sizes. But one of the areas that both Timmons and Anderson are particularly proud of is when they go to work in a community, they hire veterans to work alongside them. They train them, get them certified if they so choose, and open up opportunities for them to start their own businesses. "It's more than just somebody giving you a certificate and sending you on your way," Anderson says. "You're actually sitting in a classroom and getting the theoretical side. It's equipping them with this foundation of knowledge and not just the lingo."

This pay-it-forward mentality only helps to spread their message of creating a clean environment. "I think the environment should be at a homeostasis: equal with no one doing anything wrong to it," Timmons says. "We can't totally live without chemicals, but if we can reduce our dependence, I think it would be a positive thing. I would say for anyone that's interested in going green, don't let the initial, upfront price or cost deter you from doing what's good in the long run. Years two, three, and beyond, cost is not an issue, yet you've done so much to impact the environment and people's lives. So look beyond that. Give this green thing a chance because it'll make a difference in your lives and the environment we live in." MJB

TIP: WANT TO GO GREEN?

Start by assessing your own situation to create a baseline to work from. Something as simple as adding up the energy and water bills would be a good place to start. The next logical step would be an energy audit.

Many green policies are attractive and beneficial from a financial standpoint. There's a wide range of options available, and it's really up to each individual to decide how far they want to pursue any green initiatives. "People need to wake up and recognize that times have changed and that things that may have not been cost-effective even a few years ago make business sense now," says Ed Seliga chair for the New Jersey chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council and COO of Advanced Solar Products.



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