



Health Care Can Achieve Best Green Practices

By Steve Ronstrom
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Last year, Sacred Heart Hospital was one of only six hospitals nationwide to be awarded the Practice Greenhealth Environmental Leadership Award. The award recognizes the hospital's innovative programs that set industry standards for waste reduction and pollution prevention. Sacred Heart received this award because of its commitment and decision to build a green program, which is derived from its mission to be good stewards of the environment and to others.



Sacred Heart Hospital, located in Eau Claire, Wis., found the easiest way to implement green initiatives is by forming a focused team. The team's objective was to evaluate sustainable strategies and also explore and determine how to incorporate them into everyday practices. What we discovered is our "Green Team" had to consist of more than those within our campus. Therefore, we reached out to the local community and beyond, including farmers, builders, charitable organizations and even Third World countries.

Our green initiatives are unique to "our team" and include:

- **"Buy Local" Food Initiative** – Located in rural Western Wisconsin, we found it appropriate to team up with local farmers in our region. Partnering with them allowed us to develop a Buy-Local program committing 10 percent of the hospital's \$2 million food budget to purchase locally grown products. This commitment supports local farms and conserves energy by reducing fuel necessary for transporting food supplies from greater distances.
- **Food Scraps for Animal Feed** – Since 2008, more than 25,000 pounds of scrap produce has been donated to a local ranch for animal food. In addition to feeding the animals, the food scrap donation reduces the hospital's costs for sewage solids, sewer assessment and solid disposal waste removal.
- **Extra Food Shared** – Each year, Sacred Heart donates more than 8,000 pounds of leftover food to the St. Francis Food Pantry. The hospital also provides Meals on Wheels food to homebound senior citizens and the disabled.
- **Used Equipment for Third World Countries** – Via the Hospital Sisters' Mission Outreach, Sacred Heart Hospital's parent organization, the hospital has distributed more than 8,400 items of medical equipment to needy hospitals and clinics in Third World countries including beds, wheelchairs, exam lights, walkers, medical carts and various other items.
- **Porcelain Fixtures** – During construction or remodels of patient rooms, all porcelain fixtures, sinks, tiles and more are routinely donated to Hope Gospel Mission and Building Hope for resale to homeowners, builders and other organizations in need of materials. This reduces construction waste in landfills while helping those in need.

The success of our green initiatives has allowed us to maintain our status with Practice Greenhealth for 2009. And because of the positive responses received, we will continue to expand our Buy-Local initiative and begin to combine laundry services with our sister hospital, St. Joseph's, to reduce energy use and lower the bio-burden.

While we have been recognized as a green leader, we are learning and searching for additional ways to increase our efforts. In fact, our Green Team is growing and hospital leadership has challenged that group to proactively seek ways where we can put new systems and policies in place. Our goal is to support our teams in those efforts and ask for their support in return. And while our successful efforts now will help preserve resources for our children and grandchildren, we'll continue to build on these to do what's best for our organization, community, state and world.

Steve Ronstrom joined Sacred Heart Hospital in 1998 as CEO. His priority is to minimize excess operating costs and reengineer management services to continue to provide a patient-focused system. Under his leadership, the hospital has gained a patient-satisfaction rating in the top 1 percent in the nation. He can be reached at stever@shc.hshs.org.