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Beneath the Snow:

A Greener Genoa Underway Downtown

Standing on Main Street in downtown Genoa, the average visitor might not guess that this area may be one of the greenest parts of the community. However, many downtown businesses are serious about recycling, using renewable energy and selling organic products. “One of our goals is to see that downtown is relevant to the future of the community,” said Genoa Main Street executive director Mim Evans. “By taking the lead in implementing green policies, downtown businesses are setting an example of what can be done.”

Winery Runs on Wind

Prairie State Winery is serious about the environment. “A large portion of the recent expansion of Prairie State Winery was done to include greater space for production and to incorporate our desire and need for green energy,” owner Maria Mamoser said. The Mamosers’ chose to recycle an existing downtown building rather than build a new facility. By reusing an existing building, all the building materials were salvaged, reducing waste while eliminating the need for energy to manufacture and transport new materials to the site.

Last year Prairie State became the first winery in Illinois to be run on wind power. A 50-foot-tall wind turbine was erected on their downtown property. Maria explained that the turbine is an outgrowth of their business philosophy. “We are able to show green energy is accessible, affordable and supported within our community,” she said. “We are able to incorporate green energy into the daily business of making and selling wine even at the grape growing and harvesting levels.

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“Foremost, we are continuing to grow our business by incorporating the knowledge that we are living gentler on the land. For us, it is taking our lifestyle and incorporating it into our livelihood.”

In the process they received the enthusiastic support from both the city planning commission and the city council for their greenery initiative.

Older Items become Treasures

Anyone interested in decorating their home with unique and interesting items, will find two downtown shops that have what they are looking for, and both rely on recycled goods.

Antique collectors may not think of themselves as environmentalists but they are--by their very definition, antiques are recyclables. Laughing Cat Antiques, owned by Cris Johnson, offers a wide variety of furniture, clothing, home décor and collectibles. While the shop has only been open a short time, Genoa residents and visitors from out of town have already made it a popular source for green furnishings.

“What better way to recycle, than to recycle the past,” Cris said. “Come to Laughing Cat and see how the past is recycled every day.”

Poppy Seed Primitives is also in the recycling business. Sandy Spier’s shop carries a variety of home décor items, many crafted from castoffs that would have landed in the trash. Sandy regularly shops garage and estate sales looking for things that can be remade into interesting new items. Once in the shop, visitors find that everything is displayed on reused furniture. Jewelry hangs from an old window frame. Cleverly reused items include typewriter keys made into jewelry and doorknobs that have become picture holders. Sandy’s latest find is old bowling pins. “I’m working on converting them into snowmen,” she said.

All Green and Organic

Evelyn Cooley, owner of Wild Thyme Herb Garden, has been promoting earth friendly remedies, foods and personal care products for years. Everything in the shop is produced in an environmentally friendly manner. Evelyn grows many of the herbs and dried flowers in the organic garden behind the shop. Evelyn goes beyond carrying environmentally friendly products.

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She also offers her customers a wealth of advice on organic and natural products. She is happy to share her organic garden with visitors interested in learning her gardening techniques or just looking for a quiet refuge from the bustle of daily life.

Genoa's Car Industry Environmentally Friendly

While the new car industry works to become more environmentally friendly, the auto repair industry is way ahead of the game. Auto repair is all about maintaining the cars on the road and reducing the burden on landfills.

Downtown Genoa is home to four auto repair businesses. Glidden Auto, Genoa Automotive Repair, Action Automotive and NAPA/Genoa Auto Parts all help area car owners keep their cars running and out of the landfill. A well maintained car can go 200,000 miles, much further than they used to.

While they are focusing on keeping cars on the road, Genoa mechanics are also recycling. Joyce Sester of Genoa Automotive Repair said that recycling is a big part of how they run their business. "We recycle used oil, old tires and metal parts." Recycling oil has a significant impact on the environment. According to the American Petroleum Institute, recycling just two gallons of used oil can generate enough energy to run the average household for twenty-four hours.

Tony Nikols of Glidden Auto said, "The EPA has required recycling for some time. We send two 55- gallon drums of waste oil over to Kingston to be used at the waste oil heating facility." In addition to generating heat, recycling the oil keeps it from contaminating soil or water. Downtown repair shops also are a drop off point for residents wishing to recycle used oil.

Greening your Wardrobe

Clothing has a significant impact on the environmental. The manufacture of polyester and other synthetic fabrics is an energy-intensive process requiring large amounts of crude oil and releasing emissions including volatile organic compounds, particulate matter, and acid gases such as hydrogen chloride. Other by-products are emitted in the wastewater from polyester manufacturing plants.

The production of natural fabrics can also result in environmental problems. According to the journal Environmental Health Perspectives, cotton, one of the most popular and versatile fibers used in clothing manufacture, has a significant environmental footprint. This crop accounts for a quarter of all the pesticides used in the United States, according to the USDA.

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With this background on the impact of the manufacture of new clothing, it is easy to see that a business that extends the life of your clothing is good for the environment. The Perfect Fit Tailor Shop, owned by Fernando Cruz, does just that. Local residents may be motivated by the chance to save money by repairing an item rather than replacing it, and not realize the positive impact on the environment. With a large percentage of clothing sold in this country imported from abroad, extending the life of each article not only reduces pollution but also saves the energy consumed by bringing new clothes into the country.

Green Space for a Greener Downtown

While many of the downtown businesses are doing their part to “green” downtown, there is little actual green space. Without a park, courthouse square or school yard, there is little room in downtown Genoa for green space. Genoa Main Street, Inc. plans to address the situation.

The Main Street organization is looking forward to starting a community garden this summer. The garden will be located on a currently vacant lot. Sandy Spier chairs Main Street’s Design Committee, which will be responsible for the garden. She said, “We hope to get downtown residents involved in the garden. While downtown businesses have been going green, downtown itself has little green space. This will be a nice addition.” Anyone interested in helping with the garden can contact the Main Street office at 815 784-6961 or genoamainsreet@atcyber.net. More information on downtown activities and businesses can be found at www.genoamainstreet.org.

Genoa Main Street, Inc. is a volunteer organization dedicated to preserving Genoa’s historic heritage and small town wholesomeness while promoting economic development and downtown improvements.

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Caption: OilRecycling7418.jpg

As part of the growing greening movement, Greg Sester, Genoa Automotive Repair, transfers oil from collected during servicing of customers' cars to a larger tank. The accumulated oil is picked up for recycling. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says more than 380 million gallons (more than one-half of all oil purchased each year) is recycled. A versatile product, used oil can be re-refined, reconditioned or reused.