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Biz Buzz: Six firms honored for green practices

Six businesses dedicated to saving energy and reducing their waste were honored Tuesday with Green Awards by the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce.

"We think these awards show it makes good business sense to be green — and brands this community as an environmentally sensitive place," said chamber President Dave Garth.

The keynote speaker was Deborah Lyons, an environmental sustainability specialist for Hewlett-Packard in Palo Alto. The high-technology company, which is the largest information technology company in the country, was recently named by Newsweek magazine as the greenest company in America.

Lyons' message was that saving the planet is good for businesses — and the bottom line. She came to San Luis Obispo hoping to inspire local enterprises to measure their energy usage and waste, be efficient with their resources and find new ways to save costs. But after listening to what county businesses were doing to reduce their carbon footprint, she said, "I'm the one who's inspired."

The award winners, chosen from among 70 nominees, were:

- Mindbody Inc, a company that sells business management and appointment-scheduling software to the fitness and spa industry. When it constructed its new offices, it chose to use recycled materials and energy efficient lighting, and they came up with other ideas that have reduced its energy usage to one-fourth of what it used to consume.
- Food Bank Coalition of SLO County, a nonprofit organization that gives 5 million pounds of food to the needy a year. The Food Bank has partnered with local farmers to get produce from them, thereby reducing the amount of produce shipped into the county. It purchased refrigerated trucks to rescue food from local markets before it was thrown away, it has an electric vehicle, solar panels on its warehouse and has partnered with Cal Poly to educate young people about sustainable, organic gardening.
- Central Coast Seafood, a wholesaler and processor of local seafood, focuses on sustainable fishing and ocean conservation awareness and operates biodiesel trucks and energy-efficient refrigerators.
- Central Coast Vineyard Team, a nonprofit partnership of growers, wineries and natural resource professionals that educates farmers on sustainable wine grape-growing practices.
- Sports Warehouse, an e-commerce company that sells and ships sports equipment. The company bales and recycles more than 15,000 pounds of used cardboard every two weeks. It retrofitted a 100,000-square-foot warehouse with a geothermal energy system, automated timers and more efficient lighting, promotes biking to work and uses well-water for landscaping;
- Semmes and Co. Builders, a construction company dedicated to innovative alternative energy and sustainable building practices such as passive solar heating, championing gray water and rain-catchment systems, and recycling construction waste, building with solar powered generators and educating the community on conservation technologies.

— *Melanie Cleveland*

Grants available to help nonprofits

Nonprofit organizations that would like help learning how to collaborate with other groups are invited to apply for funding to help reduce the cost of professional facilitation. Local consultants can offer customized support in

