

Visitors to Lawrenceville-based Graphic Communications Corporation (GCC) are greeted immediately with a banner that proclaims in giant green letters: “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle!” Printed on the lanyards for visitor badges is the statement: “I used to be a plastic bottle; please recycle me when I am worn out.” The board room is decorated with a poster-sized version of a company brochure that declares that “Going Green is serious business.”

Five big blue recycling bins line the back wall of the employee break room for aluminum cans, plastic water bottles, small appliance batteries, steel cans and compact fluorescent light bulbs respectively. A green flyer on the door features a personal message from GCC President Hoyt Tuggle about the value of environmental preservation featuring a picture of Iron Eyes Cody, the actor who played the American Indian who became an iconic symbol of “Keep America Beautiful” public service TV ads in the 1970s thanks to a tear in one eye after seeing a trash-filled stream.

Tuggle cannot recall one single incident that inspired him to launch an ongoing program to “green” his company about two years ago. However, he does credit his grandchildren with waking him up to environmental concerns. “I have never wanted to do anything here that would embarrass my grandchildren,” Tuggle says. “I don’t print anything pornographic or racist and this falls under the same category.”

Today ecofriendly practices are at the core of GCC’s corporate culture, from offering customers recycled papers to papers certified by either the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) or Sustainable Forest Initiative (SFI), the two major certifications confirming an unbroken chain of custody from pulp originating in well-managed forests to paper. Their employee recycling program extends to the press room for such diverse items as paper, plastics and corrugated cardboard. The company prioritizes energy efficiency whenever updating equipment and has made reducing greenhouse gas emissions another goal.

An increasing number of printers in Georgia and across the nation have been going green. A large part of this embracement of environmental responsibility has



GCC’s company brochure raises green awareness



Visitor badge reads “I used to be a plastic bottle; please recycle me when I am worn out”

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come from the desires of printers like Tuggle to be more sensitive to the world's dwindling resources, and in response to recent scientific studies about the negative effects of unchecked global warming.

However, going green is not just about doing good. It's also good business. GCC's efforts have saved the company money by reducing costs for trash collection and disposal and energy use. Designers are specifying recycled papers 57 percent more often and FSC- and SFI-certified papers 48 percent more often, according to a 2009 annual survey by Graphic Design USA. That the demand for sustainable paper is on the rise can be seen through comparison with last year's numbers which were 48 percent for recycled paper and just 21 percent for FSC- and SFI-certified papers. Forty-one percent of designers reported that sustainability as a design factor in their projects was increasing, while only 6 percent saw a decrease.

Tuggle and wife Marie founded GCC in 1972 in a small building with just three employees. In 1976, they were joined by Ann Stallard, now the company's CEO, and a few years later, sons Scott and Brett Tuggle also entered the family

business. Today, the full-service printing company has expanded to 50 full-time associates in a 58,000-square-foot facility in Lawrenceville. Clients range from small businesses to Fortune 1000 companies, and GCC has won numerous awards for its industry leadership from the Printing & Imaging Association of Georgia (PIAG) and the Printing Industries of America (PIA).

“The first step to becoming more ecofriendly is to recognize that this effort does not need to be all or nothing right away but will be more successful if approached as a step-by-step process”, Tuggle says. GCC started in 2007 by just putting two bins for recycling plastic water bottles and aluminum cans in the break room, accompanied by a “green insert” in all employee paychecks explaining the benefits of recycling and asking everyone to do their part. Knowing this envelope is one everybody will open, he continues to use paycheck inserts to inform employees of new developments in the program and encourage them to contribute ideas.

“People reacted very positively because I couched this in terms of our children and grandchildren and what we are going to leave for them,” he adds. “They came with affirmations almost immediately and would say ‘I’m glad we’re doing this, why didn’t we think about this a long time ago?’”

Employees also came to Tuggle with additional suggestions. The bins for recycling small appliance batteries, steel cans and compact fluorescent light bulbs were all employee ideas. For example, a recent “green insert” began “You have probably noticed the blue barrel in the break room. We are proud to announce we have instituted a battery recycling program here at Graphic Communications. This was the brainchild of Mark Coggins.”

The insert signed by Hoyt continued by describing what types of batteries could be recycled and what kinds could not be, such as automobile or non-dry cell

“TOGETHER WE CAN DO OUR PART IN BETTER PROTECTING THE PLANET ON WHICH WE LIVE.”



“We’ve reduced by 70 percent what we send to the dumpster. All of this used to go in a landfill.”

batteries; urged people to thank Coggins for his suggestion; and thanked everyone for “all that you do and keep up the good work.” Other inserts have closed with “Together we can do our part in better protecting the planet on which we live.” Now employees even bring items from home to add to the receptacles, saving the additional carbon emissions they would have generated if each one had drove to a recycling center themselves.

Tuggle has never penalized an employee for forgetting to recycle, but he has tried to lead by example and employs some subtle strategies. For example, every desk at GCC now has two waste baskets next to it—one for paper to be recycled and one for trash. When he sees someone drop a recyclable item into the trash unit, he doesn’t say anything. “While they are there, I’ll just reach down and pick that item up from the regular wastepaper basket and put it in the recycling one,” he says. As noted previously, the recycling program extends to all the work areas in the building. Huge corrugated cardboard boxes on palettes and stackable plastic containers in the press room and bindery are labeled to accept paper, chipboard or a combination of both for recycling. Additional receptacles collect plastic packing materials such as shrink and stretch wrap and bubble wrap. An entire wall is lined with corrugated cardboard that is broken down and then removed for recycling. Even the wooden palettes are recycled. Receptacles sit next to presses to remind and make it easy for employees to add materials. When boxes are full, they are loaded into a trailer which is picked up by Caraustar Industries Inc., an Austell-based firm which transforms the materials into recycled and converted paperboard and paperboard products.

The recycling program also saves the company money on waste disposal and generates a modest revenue since Caraustar pays a fee for each ton of collected paper, corrugated cardboard and chipboard. Prior to recycling, the firm easily filled its dumpster three times a week, but now it only requires once-a-week pick-up.

“We’ve reduced by 70 percent what we send to the dumpster,” Tuggle says. “All of this used to go in a landfill.”

When Tuggle started thinking about going green, he began to recognize that GCC and the paper and printing industries already had plenty of practices that were sustainable but not always labeled as such. For example, GCC has been using recycled paper since 1992, and the paper industry now plants more trees than they harvest, he says. He laments that the paper and printing industries “have not done a good job of public relations” in increasing public awareness of their achievements in sustainability and argues that paper is a truly renewable and sustainable resource.

“There are certain places in the world where they are still cutting down old forests to make paper, but the US paper industry does not use that paper,” Tuggle says. “Tree loss today in America is mostly due to the development of homes.”

In February 2008, GCC took the additional step of qualifying for FSC and SFI certifications to ensure that clients can be confident that all the paper for a particular

A stack of cardboard waits to be picked up for recycling (*below*), and a friendly sign for the delivery person spreads awareness of energy consumption (*right*)



project originated in pulp from well-managed forests. FSC/SFI signs now hang in the press room, marking the location of certified paper, and employees fill out chain-of-custody worksheets to verify that no non-certified paper has been used in a certified job.

GCC also has been using plant-based inks for nearly two decades with the exception of two unusual colors that are not available in that format. Plant-based inks emit some of the lowest amounts of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) currently available. "We have used linseed oil-based ink for years," he adds. "Soy

got a lot of media coverage thanks to marketing, so many people think that the only vegetable-based inks were soy-based, but that's not so."

Additionally, none of GCC's inkjet printers use solvent-based inks, and the company has reduced or eliminated VOC-producing solvents in all its departments. The ability to print without solvents was a major factor in the selection of a flatbed OCE Arizona large-format inkjet printer. "Solvents are not good for the environment, but they're also not good for people to work around because they can breathe in the fumes," Tuggle says. All of GCC's ink waste is either recycled into black ink or burned to be reused in concrete products.

Advances in digital printing and technology have not only changed the printing process but also decreased the industry's overall environmental impact, Tuggle says. Digital printing has made smaller and custom print jobs affordable, meaning less paper use. The ability to transport larger files via email and FTP sites not only saves time, paper and ink but also conserves gasoline and decreases carbon emissions from vehicles. Computer-to-plate technology eliminates silver waste and further saves water and energy, and GCC has reduced its "make-ready" waste sheets by 70 percent by presetting the press directly with the data that makes the plates. "In the old days, we would pick up a job or a client would bring it to us," he adds. "There's also a lot less waste when you can send a file directly to the press."

Nevertheless, Tuggle cautions that using the Internet is not environmentally cost-free. Technology requires electricity, and transferring and storing large files requires increasingly larger servers that also need to be energy-efficient. “There are certain things that we have no control over,” he adds. “We can’t buy wind power, but we can make sure what we do here doesn’t hurt the environment.”

Still, GCC had a leg up on energy conservation because the press room is almost completely underground. “We never have to use any energy to heat it because the heat generated by the motors and pumps is sufficient,” Tuggle says. “In the summer, it stays cool and that means less energy for air-conditioning. A year and a half ago, we also installed a white roof with a special coating that reduces our energy costs by 30 percent in the summer.”

More environmentally friendly actions by GCC include scheduling paper deliveries at night so that trucks incur less idling due to traffic congestion, eliminating petroleum-based foam peanuts from packaging, using only chemicals certified to be acceptable to municipal sewage systems, utilizing only raw material suppliers that have been at the forefront of green and sustainable practices, and employing reusable cloth for cleaning rather than paper-based cleaning supplies. GCC employees receive training on all the aspects of the green program from recycling to handling inks and chemicals.

“LIKE LIFE IS NOT
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While GCC’s green practices sound impressive, Tuggle himself has been hesitant to tout sustainability too heavily in the company’s promotional materials until even more progress has been made. “One of the things we are really sensitive about is we do not want to be guilty of what is called ‘greenwashing,’” Tuggle says. “We don’t want people to think that we’re all the way there, but we do promote it to the extent that we sent a brochure to our existing and prospective customers.” The latter was prepared to announce that GCC had achieved FSC and SFI certification, but it also included info about other efforts to go green and the company’s commitment to be as green a printer as possible.”

He adds that he has not tracked whether or not the green strategy has attracted new clients, but he does feel that it may have cemented the company’s relationship with some customers. “My general feeling is that we have had customers who felt good about doing business with us because of this,” Tuggle says. “People have come

through the building and said things like ‘this is neat.’ That’s probably the biggest phrase that we get.”

GCC is evaluating the next steps to take in its sustainability program, but Tuggle admits that decreased availability of credit in this economic downturn has made it harder to come up with upfront costs to make some changes that would increase energy conservation and reduce expenses over the long term. One is switching all fluorescent light fixtures to more energy-efficient compact fluorescent ones. Another is installing a process that would allow the heat generated by the company’s new Heidelberg Speedmaster CD 102 offset press to be repurposed to heat the bindery department in the winter’s coldest months. “It’s very expensive to install, but I estimate that it will pay for itself within four to five years,” Tuggle says. “The expectation is that we can reduce electrical costs for heating the bindery in the winter by more than 50 percent.”

Nevertheless he does believe that current economic uncertainty will not cause companies to abandon their ecofriendly goals. “This is a bump in the road, but it’s not going to stop the green movement,” he adds. “It’s reached a point where it has a momentum of its own.”

Even if Tuggle feels that GCC has a long way to go to be as green as he’d like to be, he hopes that other printers will look to the accomplishments the company has made in just two years and be inspired to follow in their footsteps.

“Like life is not a destination, going green is a journey and we are making a difference not just in what we do, but also in changing people’s minds about how they think about the environment,” he says.

Visit www.gccprint.org to learn more about the company.