

The Towbes Group is the 2012 City of Santa Barbara Water Hero



Not all heroes wear capes and fight crime; some fight for sustainability. The Towbes Group, a local commercial and residential property management company, is one such hero. Thanks to motivated employees at the company who saw a need to be better environmental stewards, the Towbes Group has made significant advances in saving water and implementing other sustainable practices at their corporate office and properties that they manage.

The motivation for sustainability was not a top-down mandate; it came from interest throughout the company which has helped it gain momentum at the corporate office and other properties. The corporate office was certified through the Green Business Program of Santa Barbara County in July of 2010. They focused their sustainability on 3 main areas: water conservation, energy conservation, and recycling. Through retrofitting their toilets and urinals to high efficiency models and installing new aerators, their monthly water use at the office has dropped by 41%, which is about 8,500 gallons per month. They also had significant reductions in energy use by installing LED lights, motion detectors, and a new air conditioning system, resulting in a 25% energy reduction. Recycling was increased by 38% by simply reducing the number (and size) of trash cans and increasing the number of recycling bins, thus also reducing their trash hauling rates.

Due to the success of their sustainability efforts at the corporate office, The Towbes Group decided to implement similar measures at some of their managed properties, including the Rancho Franciscan Senior Apartments. Over the past several years, Rancho Franciscan has taken steps to cut down on their water and energy use, but the main push came in 2011 when they went through the Green Business Certification process for their leasing office and common areas. In previous years, Rancho Franciscan had installed smart irrigation controllers which provide the appropriate watering schedule based on weather changes and reduced their landscape water use by 29%. Last year, in order to further increase their water savings, planter beds on the property were converted from sprinklers to drip irrigation. Half of the cost of this retrofit was covered by the City's Smart Landscape Rebate. With these recent changes, Rancho Franciscan Senior Apartments experienced further savings, for an additional 40% reduction in landscape water use!



In addition to saving water, The Towbes Group has eliminated the structural damage issues they were experiencing with the sprinklers. Beverly Wright, Business Manager of Rancho Franciscan said, "not only is it saving valuable resources and significantly reducing water costs, but what makes me excited is that it also eliminates damage to the stucco that is near the planters and eliminates moisture intrusion

into the buildings.” Slippery, mossy sidewalks were also eliminated by the new irrigation retrofit, which were a safety issue.



The sustainable practices that Rancho Franciscan has implemented have been accepted and encouraged by the residents who are proud to live at a site with a beautiful, efficient landscape, and they have taken part in the new programs. The common areas have been retrofitted to save energy with motion detectors and LED lighting, and signs are posted to remind residents to turn off lights when leaving the room. The City provided recycling education to Rancho Franciscan residents and their trash pickup has been reduced while their recycling has increased, resulting in a cost savings. As well as reducing their utility bills, Rancho Franciscan has become a community that keeps sustainability a priority.

Key in all these sustainable changes was education, and that’s where the Green Business Program and its partners were helpful. Craig Minus, Towbes Development Project Manager, said “the first step was to get educated about it to find out where the areas of improvement would be, and then how to implement them here in the corporate office.” As they realized, there’s a lot of small changes you can make operationally. Some of these internal improvements in sustainability are: bulk purchasing to reduce the amount of packaging and delivery fuel, an internal slogan of “scan when you can” to reduce the amount of paper used, ceramic dishes and compost bins in the kitchens, and their electric vehicle, “Towbie” is used for local trips to their properties.

Through the success of their conservation efforts at the corporate office and Rancho Franciscan, the Towbes Group is planning to continue these efforts throughout their whole property portfolio. Because this commitment to sustainability came from within the company, it will help them successfully implement other water wise and sustainable practices in their properties. “Conservation and improving where we live, where we do business, is consistent with everything the Towbes Group is trying to do in this community, so I think our water conservation efforts are part of that corporate culture,” stated Craig Zimmerman, President of the Towbes Group. And it shows! Thanks to The Towbes Group for being the City’s 2012 Water Hero!

