



ON THE HOME FRONT

Green Tier gives developers a better image

BY JENNIFER PFAFF

Mark Neumann harbors fond memories of kneeling in the dirt and planting trees with his father.

They planted hundreds of trees in great pine plantings that color today's Wisconsin landscape.

The memory is more than a personal treasure. It inspires Neumann to lead his company, Neumann Developments Inc., in seeking ways to protect green spaces, water and air. The Waukesha-based developer proudly points to company projects that boast anywhere from 50 percent to 90 percent green space.

Like many like-minded developers, it sticks in Neumann's craw when he hears those in his profession maligned as environmental villains. So he's doing something about what he sees as an unfair image.

Neumann Developments is one of the first developers in the state jumping on board with the new Wisconsin Department of Natural



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Resources' Green Tier initiative, and Neumann said he hopes others follow suit and show the world that development doesn't necessarily mean destruction of the land.

"A lot of the time, people in the development industry are seen as people who want to rape the land, that we don't care," Neumann said. "It's nice to have the opportunity to show that's not the case."

Green Tier is a state program recognizing companies — in all industries — that voluntarily go beyond environmental regulatory minimums by creating a better working relationship with the DNR and a green-friendly public awareness campaign.



Neumann Developments Inc.'s Autumn Ridge subdivision exemplifies many concepts stressed in the Green Tier program. The Ixonia project leaves a majority of the land undeveloped and will exceed environmental minimum standards for water infiltration and sediment removal, thanks in part to six water-retention ponds.

The Wisconsin Builders Association is leading the charge, having signed a charter with the DNR that will allow its members to join Green Tier and make use of association resources in accomplishing the program's goals, said John Kisiel, director of the WBA's Development Council.

"This program basically says, 'Forget random acts of environmental kindness — do it the same way every time,'" he said. "The biggest thing is taking a thought process and writing it down."

Most companies within the building industry already exceed minimum standards when possible, Kisiel said. But in order to join Green Tier, a firm must be able to prove a track record of that kind of commitment.

Once accepted into the program, the company agrees to create an environmental-management system, which is a written document codifying its environmental strategies and practices. WBA is creating a base document that members can customize to their unique situations, Kisiel said.

Those who agree to the WBA charter agree to implement improved sediment control and storm-water management processes, decrease the volume of construction waste, emphasize the use of ➤



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native plants, use energy-efficient features when possible, improve the predevelopment hydrology of the site, use measures to protect aquatic habitats and educate their workers, clients and customers about best practices.

In return, Green Tier members receive a single point of contact at the DNR to make permitting, inspections and other procedures faster and more efficient. Companies are also allowed to do more self-inspection and reporting, said Mark McDermid of the DNR.

Firms that take part in Tier 2 of the program gain the ability to work with the DNR to remove regulatory hurdles that prevent a company from achieving maximum environmental protection, McDermid said.

The prospect of a single point of contact is a major selling point for Green Tier, Kisiel said.

“If we are willing to submit to a higher level of performance, we expect a higher level of service,” he said. “Time becomes money in the building industry.”

But not every Green Tier member is counting on that perk.

Neumann said he is skeptical the process will smooth out, but he said it also doesn’t matter that much to him.

For Neumann, Green Tier’s biggest benefits are the public-relations boost that comes with state recognition of willingness to work for the environment and the streamlining of practices within a company.

“This isn’t a lot different than what we’ve been doing,” Neumann said. “But knowing it and quantifying it and documenting it is a great thing.” ■