

# Mixed Green ...

## Sustainable business has local roots

By ANN CHRISTY DYBVIK  
CORRESPONDENT

Jim Schulman attributes much of his passion for environmental issues and sustainability to the education he received in middle and high school as a student in the Menomonie School District. A former resident whose parents, Bill and Shirley Schulman, still live in the community, Jim was recently back in town for his 30-year high school reunion.

"It was after I came back for this last short visit and drove around the countryside near Knapp," Jim says, "that I realized my experiences here were very formative for my current ecological understandings."

As a middle and high school student, Jim participated with his class in annual school-sponsored field trips to the Menomonie School District's environmental site.

"It was there that we learned how to measure air and water pollution, and how to understand the impact of species on the environment," Jim says. "I did not realize how influential those experiences were until I returned to the area and revisited the site. I was also part of a group that helped write curriculum in the summer for the district's environmental studies program. This allowed students to have input into the learning process."

In between his high school years and current venture, Jim earned his undergraduate degree in philosophy from Carlton in 1975 followed by a master's degree in architecture from the University of Minnesota. He moved to the Washington, D.C., area and began his practice in residential and commercial architecture. Jim soon transitioned into the realm of green design and sustainability, however, making him an early adopter of the green concept.

As his ideas took root, he founded Sustainable Community Initiatives, (SCI), and later Community Forklift, a business with a mission to foster community redevelopment and promote the concept of reusing materials for building and remodeling



SUBMITTED PHOTO/FOR DUNN COUNTY NEWS

**Jim Schulman stands in a warehouse in Washington D.C. surrounded by an example of some of the donated items Community Forklift (a green concept initiative he founded) has to offer.**

rather than buying new. And this is probably exactly what Jim was meant to do.

Bill and Shirley Schulman smile as they describe how, as even a very young boy, Jim loved to find new uses for things.

"He could never throw anything away," Shirley says. "He used to save old light bulbs and wanted to turn them into test tube beakers."

Bill and Shirley recall how

Jim took all their old bulbs outside one day, spread them on a blanket, and tried to remove the tops so they could be beakers for his chemistry projects.

"And he was the only kid I knew who wanted to sit and read the *Wisconsin Blue Book*, Bill says. "He wanted to learn all the little details."

### Green details

Today Jim focuses on the small and not-so-small details

involved with running his nonprofit, sustainable business in the Washington area. The company specializes in supplying salvaged and green materials for reuse in home building and remodeling. Most of the items, at least 85-90 percent or more, are donated. In business a little more than a year, Community Forklift is fast approaching \$500,000 in sales. It has been receiving publicity lately too, as the concept for reuse is taking hold within the larger sustainability movement in the country. Community Forklift was recently featured in the magazine, *Architecture DC*, and in the *Washington Post*.

### Everyone wins

The business provides a win-win business situation on many fronts. Builders, contractors and deconstruction companies donate building materials salvaged from projects and receive a tax deduction. Home-owners or contractors, increasingly more interested in used, green, or salvaged building materials, purchase them at a cost at least 40-70 percent below the average. This reduces the impact of building costs on people who may not be able to afford high retail prices, breathes new life into quality salvaged materials, and saves on the environment by reducing the amount of waste that goes into landfills.

According to figures provided on the Community Forklift Web site, more than half of the debris in landfills is made up of construction waste. One of the goals of this company is to reduce that figure.

It's not all work at Community Forklift, though. To celebrate its grand opening, last year it held workshops for do-it-yourselfers, a Green Building Commerce Fair, a potluck and BBQ event, and a "blessing of the green builder" ceremony.

### Local support

Jim is enthusiastic about his home state of Wisconsin and particularly Dunn County as it moves through its own era of planning and visioning.

"The pragmatic people of western Wisconsin get things

SEE MIXED GREEN, PAGE C5

# MIXED GREEN:

## County is leader in recycling



SUBMITTED PHOTO/FOR DUNN COUNTY NEWS

### Community Forklift employee Tim Pawlik unloads wood flooring from the truck.

#### FROM PAGE C1

done," he says. As an example, he cites a fact from the early 1980s.

"When I first came back to Menomonie and started talking about recycling in the 80s," Jim says, "people practically laughed me out the door. But five years later, Dunn County was the leader in the country in recycling practices, ranked near the top in the level of waste that was recycled."

Community Forklift makes it easier for people to "choose to reuse." As an added outgrowth, new businesses providing deconstruction rather than demolition are increasing, providing jobs for the unemployed.

Customers find quality bargains to improve the value of their homes. Businesses and others who donate receive tax deductions. And ultimately, the environment feels less impact. That fact alone makes us all winners.

To read more about the Community Forklift project, go to [www.communityforklift.com](http://www.communityforklift.com). The larger sustainable organization also has a Web site, [www.suscomini.org](http://www.suscomini.org).

**ANN DYBVIK** can be reached at [anndybvik@charter.net](mailto:anndybvik@charter.net).

• • •

To comment on this story or others in *The Dunn County News*, go to [dunnconnect.com](http://dunnconnect.com) and click on "Post a comment."