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## Going 'green' can challenge small businesses

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First, Kirsten DeChappari replaced the incandescent light bulbs with energy-efficient LED bulbs at Evolution Bodywork & Nutrition, a wellness center she directs in Bristol. To cut down on plastic waste, DeChappari installed a line water cooler and stopped selling individual water bottles to yoga and Pilates clients. She replaced paper towels in the bathrooms with cloth towels, and installed recycling bins throughout the facility.

But several months later, the business that Evolution paid to pick up its recyclables simply stopped coming - the wellness center didn't produce enough recyclables to make the pickup profitable, DeChappari assumes. And more recently DeChappari was troubled by a news report that energy-saving LED lights create mercury that poses health and environmental risks.

"I just thought, 'I can't win,'" she said. "It's so hard ... to figure out how to go about the business of going green."

The feeling is familiar to many small business owners and managers. "Going green" is typically presented as a win-win proposition: Companies that commit to reducing their waste streams and energy use

can save money and save the environment.

But small business owners who take steps to green their businesses often say the process is not really as simple. For some, up-front costs are prohibitive, especially in a slowing economy. The rewards for energy efficiency come down the road, and with rebates that are available for many such projects.

The biggest barrier preventing small businesses from greening their operations is a lack of clear information and viable resources, said Steven F. Hamburg, director of the global environment program at Brown University's Watson Institute and an associate professor of environmental studies.

"The biggest hindrance for all of these businesses is information, and the time to understand what it takes for you to make those next steps," Hamburg said. "It's not that many people aren't interested - it's just you've got to run a business! So you're spending most of your time making the business work, and you don't have the time to invest or the energy to learn that."

Many small businesses that want to lower their monthly lighting and heating bills are prevented by owners or managers of their retail office spaces who are unwilling to make the necessary capital invest-



PBN PHOTO/FRANK MALLIN

DR. JOSEPH MATRULLO demonstrates the capabilities of the digital mammography machine at Matrullo Cosmetic Dentistry in Cranston.

ments in the projects, Hamburg said.

But business owners are largely unaware that some property owners will consider a deal in which they recoup the costs of capital investments by sharing some of the monthly savings their tenants experience as a result of a more energy-efficient building, he said.

Opportunities to reduce environmental hazards and save money through energy efficiency exist in every industry but can vary widely,

Hamburg said. As a first step, he recommended that businesses contact National Grid and other utility companies, which can conduct energy audits to identify steps that can be taken to become more energy efficient, and offer rebates on many such projects.

Many local Chambers of Commerce and national industry associations offer further information and other resources on going green in their communities and industries,

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he said.

"Commercial businesses, service providers, the products industries - each one is going to be different, and that is the challenge, because there isn't a cookie cutter," Hamburg said. "It's not as if you can write one document and say 'small businesses in Rhode Island, do X.'"

Three months ago, Evans Find-

ings Co., a metal-stamping manufacturer in East Providence, installed a new air compressor that uses only as much electricity as is needed for the volume of air it is compressing, and shuts off by itself when possible.

The \$23,000 project was paid for in part with a \$5,000 rebate from National Grid, and is expected to produce annual energy savings of 71,136 kilowatt hours, or an estimated \$8,882.

"The other compressor never shut off - it was running all the time," said Woody Sostem, Evans Findings' chief engineer. "The amount of electricity that goes into compressed air is a significant fraction of the electricity that we use in this building, and the new compressor is... much more energy efficient than the previous model that we had."

Some business owners mulling an investment in energy efficiency or a new, environmentally friendly technology crunch the numbers and decide to hold off - at least for a while.

In December, Paul J. Matrullo & Associates, a dental practice in Cranston, spent more than \$200,000 to replace its traditional film X-rays with a state-of-the-art, digital radiography system. The digital X-rays, which will eliminate about 50 gallons annually of hazardous film-development chemicals, is expected to pay for itself in about two years, Paul Matrullo said.

Digital radiography has existed for about a decade. But Matrullo is among the first dentists in Rhode Island to adopt the greener technology and he said he held off for several years until the price came down enough to guarantee a return on the investment.