

SRCCS Is Cleaning Up Our Act

by Erin Eagen

When John Tonkin came aboard as director of Santa Rosa Clean Community Systems (SRCCS) 22 years ago, he brought more than just an expert sense of leadership and a background in teaching. Tonkin joined SRCCS, located in Santa Rosa County, with the goal of creating change, not just in the way of recycling center operated or in the programs offered, but also by altering the ways in which community members think and act in relation to the planet.

According to Tonkin, the key to achieving his goal for SRCCS is to effectively implement educational aspects, along with all the center's recycling initiatives. In fact, SRCCS exists as the educational component for the county's recycling program. "You want to make sure all programs have an educational component, because education is the way to change mindsets," Tonkin explains enthusiastically. His programs seek to empower both the young and the young at heart to understand how lifestyle choices impact our planet and what we can do to tread more gently while we are here.



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Patrick Ropella is Chairman & CEO of the Ropella Group an international Executive Search, Leadership Transformation, and Corporate Consulting firm. He authored the book and web-based training program, *The Right Hire – Mastering the Art of SMART Talent Management*, and has seen his content featured in many trade magazines, business publications, and industry journals. Patrick regularly speaks at webinars, career fairs, and conferences.



Current SRCCS initiatives include the popular Green Up program, which works to beautify the community through public plantings and classes, as well as recycling for items that are not typically accepted curbside. SRCCS allows for drop-off recycling of motor oil, phone books and Christmas trees. Plastic pots can also be brought in and are reused by the Green Up Nursery, and the center accepts latex paint leftovers, to be remixed and donated to Habitat for Humanity.

Of all the ways in which SRCCS contributes to the preservation and greening of the Santa Rosa area, Tonkin feels that his biggest success as director has been securing grant funding for the most endeavors. SRCCS was awarded an IMPACT 100 grant in 2009, and that funding has allowed the organization to establish their glass recycling program, a unique community-driven initiative that utilizes the Andela glass pulverizing system to create attractive sand and gravel groundcover, known as Santa Rosa Sunshine, out of glass containers that would otherwise end up in landfills. Tonkin estimates that only about 100 Andela pulverizing machines are in operations in the United States today.

The glass recycling program is especially powerful because it creates an end-product that can be used as mulch for container plantings and flower beds, as well a landscaping material for yards,

patio bases, play areas and even septic fields. It also allows community members to actively "close the recycling loop." In eco-lingo this means seeing the commitment to recycling through, from start to finish, by purchasing and utilizing recycled products; Santa Rosa Sunshine is one such product.

A commitment to purchasing recycled product, along with several other factors, is what prompted Patrick Ropella, chairman and CEO of Ropella Group, to choose Santa Rosa Sunshine as the groundcover for his newly completed 10,000 square-foot multipurpose business facility. "It's great when you can make that full circle work," says Ropella, explaining that his business does a lot of work with renewable energy, solar energy and wind energy industries, so anything they can do that aligns with those sustainable practices holds great appeal. "We chose Santa Rosa Sunshine because it is made of glass recycled within the community. Also, the product doesn't break down and need to be reinstalled every year, and it looks awesome too," advises Ropella, adding, "We've used SRCCS for landscaping quite a bit over the years. They are a good organization, and I liked this product when I saw it in the beds at the center."

This fall, the glass recycling program will be expanded as IMPACT 100 funds are used to create an innovative recycling station at the old City Firehouse, in Milton. The creation of this facility will allow the glass to be separated and processed by color, a product option that Tonkin says consumers have requested. The firehouse will also house the city's water well and a recycling innovation station, complete with recycled plastic benches and examples of Santa Rosa Sunshine. To further SRCCS' educational goals, kiosks with information about recycling in Santa Rosa will be placed at the Fisherman's Recycling Station.

Past programs, current initiatives and a host of exciting developments and changes going on at SRCCS highlight the dedication that Tonkin and his organization bring to creating a brighter, more sustainable future for the residents of Santa Rosa.

For more information, call the Santa Rosa Clean Community at 850-623-1930 or visit SRClean.org. Santa Rosa Sunshine is available for purchase at Hall's Hardware & Lumber, 6606 Hwy. 90, Milton. Call 850-623-4622