

Going, Going, Going ... Green!

By Pam Curry

A multi-billion-dollar green economy is driving companies including Wal-Mart to change business practices and market new attributes to customers. Urban centers are "going green," positioning themselves as havens for people seeking high quality of life, attracting "creatives" left and right who are looking for a lifestyle that includes local, environmentally sustainable products and services.

A variety of green businesses that don't harm the environment and even help protect it are thriving in these areas. From local organic restaurants and green building companies to electronic recycling centers and alternative energy producers, green's the thing.

Several states have recognized this green gold and support green business

development because it makes economic sense. North Carolina recently passed The Green Act with a \$15 million minimum investment to stimulate its green economy. Thirty other states have passed some form of renewable portfolio standard, a state policy that requires electricity providers to obtain a minimum percentage of their power from renewable energy resources by a certain date. Renewable energy entrepreneurs are building businesses in these states, creating jobs and diversifying their economies.

The green economy has yet to take hold in many rural areas, including ours. West Virginia was dead last on Forbes Magazine's October 2007 list of America's "greenest" states. The article stated that "...West Virginia...suffers from a mix of toxic waste, lots of pollution and consumption and no

clear plans to do anything about it. Expect them to remain that way."

As a statewide nonprofit focusing on sustainable enterprise development, the Center for Economic Options (CEO) is committed to helping change this picture by supporting green enterprise. Opportunities for green business development in West Virginia are still relatively untapped but promising. Ecologically focused entrepreneurs benefit from emerging green markets and the reality that more people care how their products are made and from where they come.

Green enterprises are good for our communities because environmentally responsible businesses consume fewer resources, reduce stress on local infrastructure, add value to our natural resources and create jobs that are not at odds with a

high quality of life.

CEO is developing a new infrastructure, the Green Business Network (GBN), to support green enterprises and accelerate their growth. To help build the base for the GBN, CEO has connected Marshall University, Fairmont State University, Concord University, Mountain State University, WVU Tech, Davis & Elkins College, Glenville State College, University of Charleston and West Virginia University. Our community meetings, focus groups and independent research all point to the need for green business development. Through the GBN, CEO is addressing this need. We invite other partners to join us.

Pam Curry is the executive director of the Center for Economic Options (CEO). She can be reached at pcurry@economicoptions.org or (304) 345-1298.