

LET THE GREEN GAMES BEGIN!

By Colleen Morgan

Natural Awakenings has partnered with the new business LifeCity to hold a green business competition called the Gumbo Green Games. This year-long effort encourages businesses in the New Orleans area to improve their environmental performance while raising awareness of sustainability issues across the city and the region.

The Games officially begin near the spring equinox, March 21st, and will continue for one year, ending with an awards ceremony to recognize businesses that demonstrate the most success in environmental savings, cost-savings, innovation, and other related categories. Registration is open to restaurants, hotels, retail stores, offices and Mardi Gras Krewes for a fee, which covers a long list of benefits, including: 1) a basic sustainability assessment and LifeCity green business certification, 2) a free consultation including a tax credit assessment for best next steps, 3) a quarter-page Profile Ad in *Natural Awakenings Magazine*, and finally, several other opportunities for promotion and marketing through the media.

"This is a good way to communicate that you are making a



*Entrepreneur
Elizabeth Shephard
of LifeCity Inc.*

strong effort to be green," said Kirk Coco, the President of NOLA Brewery. "Letting [LifeCity] come in and take a look at what we do is a benefit to us and helps us to improve. This is also a way that we can let the buying public know that we are a company that is green. There is a push by consumers to spend their money in places that use processes they support."

Bringing in a new group of customers that care about the environment means more profit, but going green is good for the bottom line in other ways – lowering the energy and water bills, among other costs. "A lot of green practices end up saving a lot of money," Coco said. "Green practices are the most efficient practices."

LifeCity, founded by entrepreneur Elizabeth Shephard, is an environmental certification consulting business connected to a customer loyalty program. Shephard has developed metrics to assist businesses to reduce their impact on the environment through energy and water conservation, materials use and waste reduction, and staff

and customer education. Compared to other existing metrics, LifeCity offers a more personal and affordable certification, opening the doors for not just the company that's mission is green, but any company that wants to make a difference to participate in the Green Games.

"This is about taking a step in the right direction," Shephard said. "We believe that anybody can go green, and a small step is a worthwhile step."

LifeCity's website will continue to evolve and develop tools for individuals and businesses to track and measure their progress in implementing sustainable solutions, and offer recommendations on how to make improvements. These suggestions include patronizing Life-City-certified businesses, which will offer discounts through a membership card.

Deborah York, a physical therapist with Tulane Medical Center, is going to participate in LifeCity's program because she wants to make businesses aware that going green is important to consumers. "It is appealing to customers, and it promotes environmentally sound practices through competition. It makes them more marketable and fills a niche," she said. "Actually, I don't care why they do it as long as they do it."

LifeCity will evaluate all of the businesses that sign up for the Green Games and supply recommendations for improvement. This initial measurement will provide the baseline data for ongoing measurements, to be reported quarterly, that will indicate business improvements. Registrants are also encouraged to report innovative strategies they utilized, money savings, engagement of stakeholders, or

achievements in public relations or social equity categories. Businesses showing the most progress – and the most creative strategies - during each quarter will be highlighted in the magazine.

"I like the planet Earth – it's the only one I've ever been to," said Vance Levesque with the Arc of Greater New Orleans, explaining why he is planning to register the United Way agency for the Games. The Arc's Mardi Gras Bead recycling program and Vintage Garden Soups, made with locally-grown produce, employ intellectually disabled residents and have been promoting green practices for many years. Levesque, also the vice chair of the city's Sierra Club chapter, ceaselessly promotes Earth-friendly practices: "I want my grandkids to have it to share and play in also."

LifeCity and *Natural Awakenings* are partnering on the Green Games to support and uplift the green entrepreneurs in the community. It is often difficult for businesses to find the time and resources to take the step toward environmental sustainability, but the Green Games has the purpose of making it easy for businesses and giving them a motivation to realize their goals of becoming more sustainable.

"We need every company on board with implementing sustainability best-practices in order for our children to inherit a healthy future," Shephard wrote. "This is a way for businesses to protect our natural resources for future generations, while gaining customers and recognition today."

For more information on the Green Games visit www.mylifecity.com or email green@mylifecity.com.