

**April 23 Green Mondays**  
**Asheville Independent Restaurants (AIR) Lead the Way in Sustainable Practices**



This Green Monday was part of BRSI's Earth Day celebration and a report on progress toward meeting AIR's goal of making Asheville "America's Greenest Dining Destination," which will be achieved when Asheville has the highest per capita concentration of restaurants meeting Green Restaurant Association (GRA) standards for two-, three-, or four-star certification. BRSI contributed to meeting this goal with the recently completed BRSI/AIR Green Restaurant Initiative. The Initiative was funded by a \$258,000 grant from the NC Green Business Fund. Its goal was to improve the energy efficiency and use of renewable energy at 17 Asheville restaurants through equipment changes and staff education.

Four current restaurant owners or managers spoke about their experience in greening their restaurants. The discussion was moderated by Tim Ballard, BRSI's Energy Upfit Campaign Manager, who began the session by showing a video about the Initiative. The Initiative and video were featured in a recent *Huffington Post* article.

**Miki Kilpatrick**, co-owner of HomeGrown, told how she and her partners had opened their restaurant 1½ years ago with the goal of being green from the get-go. Because of this initial vision, HomeGrown achieved three-star Green Restaurant Certification<sup>®</sup> solely by changing its soap to be Green Seal certified. Miki described the certification process and mentioned some of the ways HomeGrown gained points in seven evaluation areas in GRA certification.

1. Water efficiency – replaced pre-wash nozzle that used 3 gal./minute with one that used 0.69 gal./minute with no loss of cleaning efficiency
2. Waste reduction and recycling – composts or recycles 92% of waste
3. Sustainable furnishings and building materials – bought used furnishings and/or equipment
4. Sustainable food – has contracts with local organic farms to provide some of their food
5. Energy efficiency and renewables – installed solar hot water
6. Degradable disposables – no Styrofoam, even though it is cheaper than the greener alternatives
7. Chemical use and pollution reduction – uses green-certified cleaning products

**Tony Smith**, Operations Manager for Green Sage, said that his restaurant has always claimed to be Asheville's greenest restaurant; now he can prove it. The new Green Sage South is aiming for four-star certification, a level currently reached by only six restaurants in America. He described the verification that GRA engages in to ensure the validity of its restaurant ratings, then went on to describe some of the innovative thinking that Green Sage used to improve its sustainability. One example was using a small, on-demand water heater for restroom sinks to minimize the amount of cold water that must be moved through the pipes before hot water can reach the sink from a distant hot water heater. Another example was a high-tech refrigeration system that is so cutting edge the system is not recognized in the GRA rating system. GRA is evaluating how to give Green Sage credit for its accomplishments. Mr. Smith ended by praising the cooperative spirit among AIR members.

**Sherrye Coggiola**, owner of Neo Cantina, described the challenges she faced trying to green a restaurant in a 1940s building that has an experienced staff, some of whom don't speak English and most of whom don't like change. Her objective for greening was to provide a marketing tool. She described the steps Neo Cantina has or will take to publicize its two-star certification. She said that the biggest benefit of certification to date has been staff enthusiasm. It cost Neo Cantina \$20,450 to install solar and upgrade the building, \$12,000 of which was provided by the Green Business Fund Grant. This investment

**Dan Rattigan**, co-owner of the French Broad Chocolate Lounge, initially asked what the added benefits of GRA certification would provide since the Chocolate Lounge was already following sustainable practices. However, having now gone through the process, he feels good about the help GRA provided. He stressed the benefits of certification for staff morale and for helping the staff feel they are part of Asheville's green community. Dan also spoke about educating employees on finances and affordable health insurance, paying a fair wage (certified through Just Economics), forming partnerships with local farmers when possible, and sourcing fair trade, organic ingredients when local is not an option (chocolate and coffee, for example).

After these presentations, **Mark Rosenstein**, former owner of The Market Place, described a joint AIR/Asheville Green opportunities effort, which is providing a 12-week training program in basic culinary skills for 15 people with barriers to job opportunities to prepare them for jobs in the restaurant industry. Mark reiterated the importance of teaching people to buy local produce and goods whenever possible, a practice that contributes to a more sustainable economy and a healthier population.