

# Green-minded customers choose eco-friendly products

BY CHRIS BARNCARD  
cbarncard@kenoshanews.com  
and THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

There isn't much reason for Lisa Schiller to push her Earth-friendly products.

The sales associate at Forever Floors, 5407 Green Bay Road, said green-minded customers have done their homework.

"They know specifically what they are looking for when they come in," Schiller said. "We do get more calls these days from people with higher standards for where they put their money."

It may be worth the effort for retailers to spike their offerings with eco-conscious goods, but as Americans curtail their spending, analysts expect years of rapid growth in the multi-billion dollar green products market to lose momentum.

"We just had a circular that had a page of green items in it," said Tony DeSanto, owner of Hillside True Value Hardware, 4614 52nd St. "But I can't say there was an overwhelming demand on them."

That's not to say all customers are uninterested. True Value offers paper towels made with recycled fiber, cleaning formulas that promise milder impact after they go down the drain and lawn-care products carrying organic labels.

"Obviously, this is fertilizer season, so we get inquiries about natural and

organic things and which ones don't have certain chemicals," DeSanto said. "But we don't have enough activity on that. All of that stuff, unfortunately, costs a little more."

It's unclear just how much the general decline in consumer spending will affect the green movement because eco-friendly products tend to be more expensive. Surveys show most people are willing to pay more for eco-friendly products, but a small-

er number actually do, said Michael Solomon, a professor of marketing and director of the Center for Consumer Research at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia.

"I think people do vote with their pocketbooks," Solomon said. "Right now, that is the No. 1 priority for most Americans, for most people around the world."

The Organic Trade Association forecasts nonfood organic product

sales to grow through 2010, in part because of increasing consumer awareness and wider availability, said spokeswoman Laura Batcha.

Research firm Mintel is less optimistic. In a January report, the group said it was unlikely that customers will develop new, ethical shopping patterns in a period of economic crisis and predicted organic clothing may be one of the first green segments to suffer.

Buyers may be up for directing more money toward environmental premiums as part of larger investments — willing to cut the corner on paper towels, but not a new dining room floor. Schiller said bamboo and cork remain popular eco-friendly flooring choices.

"You have to like it. It's something that's unique, and the appearance is different from the hardwood people are used to," she said. "But cork is a recycled material, and bamboo is sustainable because it grows so fast. People respond to that, and they like to hear that carpet like Mohawk SmartStrand is made with corn oil instead of petroleum."

Kim Baas, co-owner along with her sister Barb DeBerge-Henken of DeBerge's, a frame shop and gallery at 2008 63rd St., thinks her business is well-placed to draw green-friend-



KENOSHA NEWS PHOTO BY BILL SIEL

Eco-friendly frames available at DeBerge's include non-toxic finishes applied to sustainably harvested wood and incorporating cotton matting.



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DeBerge's owners and sisters Kim Baas, right, and Barb DeBerge-Henken offer handbags made from pieces of vinyl pulled from old billboards.

## GREEN: Buyers aware

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ly spending.

"Most people that are art-minded are also ecology-minded," Baas said. "Our industry has been behind in this, so we're right there at the front of everything we can do."

DeBerge's offers a range of products to meet demand, including frames made of bamboo, frames with recycled glass and matte, jewelry made from recycled bottle caps and handbags recycled from vinyl sheets that once made up billboards.

"It's more than just the obvious eco-friendly products

and the standard reduce-reuse-recycle," Baas said. "Some of the framing is renewable wood products with non-toxic finishes, which is very common in homes now. The companies we deal with have a reforestation commitment."

But whether a prospective customer bites is based on a factor that predates a movement toward low-impact consumerism.

"I think it makes people excited about the product to see these environmental benefits," Baas said. "But first and foremost it has to be beautiful with their art. That's the first thing. They're very attractive frames."

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