

Queen of Green

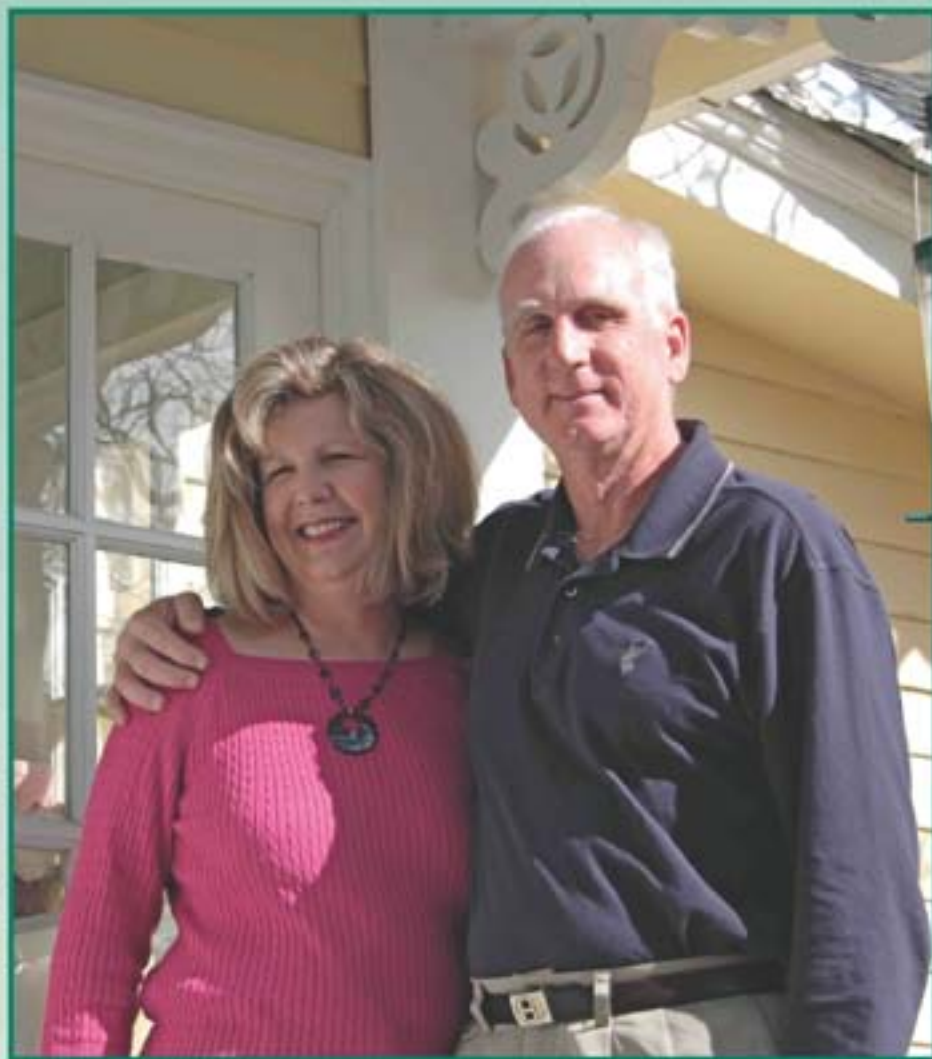
By Frank O'Hagan

Being a good steward of the environment is a responsibility we all share. Meet a McKinney resident who has been encouraged to take action in her own community

Sandra Heffernan founded her company, Sustainable Partners, LLC, in McKinney with the same energy and forward thinking of the "Green Movement" itself. Her dedication and determination to be successful in her new business is the same as her approach to conservation.

The world wide recognition of the need for energy conservation, along with substantial increases in energy costs, inflation, rising water costs, shortages in water and other financial pressures combined have created the green building movement for office buildings, both existing and newly constructed, as well as all other commercial real estate.

"The early years of my career working with countless owners and tenants in office, multi-family, and retail buildings helped to mold my thinking toward the green movement," says Sandra. She began her 25 year career in a move from her hometown of Temple, Texas to Oklahoma City where she first worked in commercial real estate, covering all facets from leasing agent to property management to National Marketing Director for Balcor, an American Express Company.



Sandra and Tim Heffernan at their restored residence in McKinney's beautiful Historical District – about which they are passionate. They practice what they preach with compost gardens and use renewable and reusable products. Photo by Mark C. O'Hagan.

Her responsibilities included analysis of office buildings throughout the United States for best management practices and leasing programs to create more value for the owner.

Having relocated to Dallas while with Balcor, Sandra continued her career with Wereldhave USA, Inc., a very conservative Dutch real estate firm. While with this company, Sandra

was responsible for the development and construction of the McKinney Green Building, one of the first privately held LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Certified Core and Shell Platinum buildings in the United States. Leed certification is controlled by the United States Green Building Council which sets performance standards for certifying the design and construction phases of new commercial buildings as well as existing buildings.

From her experience with LEED building certification, the environmental impact of building design, the construction process, and the daily operations of commercial buildings became apparent to Sandra. "Green building practices, through the LEED programs, can significantly reduce or eliminate environmental impacts, improving existing design, construction, and operations practices. Added benefits are reduced operating costs, increased worker productivity and reduced liability resulting from indoor air quality programs," she said.

People are always asking Sandra why it is so important to pursue LEED certification or implement green programs in commercial buildings. Buildings annually consume more than 30 percent of the total energy and more than 60 percent of the electricity used in the United States. In 2006, the commercial building sector produced more than 1 billion metric tons of carbon dioxide, an increase of more than 30 percent of the levels measured in 1990. On average, each person officed in a building generates 1.6 pounds of solid waste per day, the majority of which ends up in landfills.

Americans use of the public water supply continues to increase. In some parts of the United States, water levels in underground aquifers have dropped more than 150 feet since the 1940's. Efficiency measures in office buildings can easily reduce water use by 30 percent or more. This can be accomplished by using low flow plumbing fixtures coupled with sensors, automatic controls, and faucet aerators.

"All it takes is one of our hot Texas summers and drought conditions that cause water rationing for all of us to be more conscious of the importance of water and how we use it in our daily lives. The majority of us take water for granted," she said. Sandra emphasized, "It is important to look at our daily lives both at home and at work when using any materials or our resources. Consider the environmental, social and health benefits of the available materials and supplies. If a product with recycled content is purchased it expands the market for those products and slows the consumption of raw materials, not to mention the reduction of waste entering our landfills. Practice waste reduction by using the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's three basic strategies for waste reduction: (1) Source Reduction (2) Reuse (3) Recycling."

When asked about easy environmental steps Sandra suggests the following:

- Convert your standard lighting to compact fluorescents (CFL). The upfront cost of purchasing the CFL's is quickly paid back through energy saving's costs.

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■ Start a recycling program at home and at work. Know the full circle of life for all materials you purchase. In other words, where did they come from, how were they manufactured, and how long does it take for the material to break down in a land fill. You can recycle one aluminum can forever, but it takes 1,000 years for aluminum to break down in a landfill.

■ Consider renewable resources for your office and your home such as wool carpeting, bamboo products, or as Texans, mesquite wood for your floors.

■ Look at ways to save water by purchasing low flow fixtures or installing new aerators on your faucets and observe your water usage when watering your lawns.

■ Consider low VOC (Volatile Organic Compounds) paints for your home and office.

■ Implement a Green Cleaning Program.

"Our firm, sustainable Partners, LLC was created to assist in many different avenues as you endeavor to become more environmental with your commercial real estate. As a full service LEED consulting firm we provide the necessary tools and guidance to achieve certification," Sandra explained.

Sandra continues to help guide the DFW business community toward "going green." Locally, Independent Bank has chosen Sustainable Partners and Sandra Heffernan to guide them toward their LEED certification in their reconstruction of the recently purchased building at 1600 Redbud Blvd. in McKinney.



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"We wanted to be environmentally conscientious in the community as well as prudent in our investment," David Brooks, Chairman of Independent Bank said. "Our architect, Jim Wilson, recommended Ms. Heffernan and she has truly been a 'problem solver' for us during construction. She not only understands what is necessary to build a 'green building' but the practical and financial side as well. She has enabled us to spend our dollars wisely and to have the most impact," he said.

"McKinney's Economic Development Corporation has assisted as well in an effort to set an example for the environmentally friendly reconstruction of the building and the future quality of life in McKinney," Brooks said. "We expect the first stages of our move to begin this April. Sandra truly has been a delight to work with. An unexpected plus for us has been the excitement and enthusiasm that the project has created with our employees and our customers. It has really been a pleasure for all of us," he added.

So it appears Sandra Heffernan has come full circle, from her roots as a property manager to the founding of her company, which helps others manage not only their own office and commercial buildings, but their care of the environment as well. **ML**

About the author: Frank O'Hagan has a journalism background, and is now a mortgage broker with Michael Group Realtors.



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