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Local businesses encouraged to 'Go Green'

Ocala Mayor Randy Ewers praises program as way to preserve environment.

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OCALA - Local small businesses are being asked to make green in another way as part of a new initiative focused on eco-friendly practices.

Announced on Thursday during a news conference at Ocala's downtown square, the first Go Green, Save Green Small Business Challenge gets under way on July 30. It's a 30-day program spearheaded by Citra-based Rosas Farms, a certified organic farm, and the city of Ocala.

Al Rosas, who along with his wife, Erin, operate Rosas Farms, explained that the initiative will encourage local small-business owners to take five steps toward making their companies more eco-friendly, an overall step, the Rosas say, will help reduce overhead costs.

"One hurdle we have is awareness of what it means to be green," Al Rosas said. "If small business owners want, we can walk through their business and make suggestions on how they can get involved."

It's an initiative the Rosas have been involved with nationally for the last 20 years and felt it was time to introduce it locally. Al Rosas said, "and we knew we could not do this without the city's help."

Ocala Mayor Randy Ewers said the program is an opportunity for the local small business community to learn ways of saving money and being friendly to the environment, "to help preserve it for the future."

"We have a great opportunity now because so much talk is about green initiatives and global warming and we can start doing the right things now," Ewers said.

Erin Rosas said bringing the initiative to local businesses is not about making drastic changes all at once or overwhelming people with information.

"If you give them too much then they won't do anything," she said.

The initial five steps of the program could include water conservation, using energy efficient lighting, recycling paper products, using eco-friendly commercial cleaning products and adjusting air conditioning.

"We are at a crisis point now. This is our community and we are about it. We've done this national for so long and it's time to bring this home," Erin Rosas said.

The small group of local small-business owners that braved the tail-end of an afternoon rainstorm to learn how to get involved in the initiative included Liz Cosme, a personal banker with Community Bank & Trust of Florida. She said the bank, at the direction of bank president and CEO Hugh Dailey, is supportive of the initiative "and we are already green."

The bank has already gone to e-statements to reduce paper usage to print monthly statements for customers, incorporated recycling protocols and is using energy efficient systems.

The Rosas said the program, although targeted to small businesses, is really structured for everyone to take part.

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