



## Becoming Green

By Lisa Toller

A movie, a poker game and an orphaned mutt from New Orleans all figured into NewLevel Group's foray into the green arena, which eventually led to the company becoming Napa's first Certified Green Business in the last 10 years.

NewLevel Group was founded in March 2004 by four business colleagues who knew they wanted to create a consulting company that was different from the inside out—different from organizations that were focused on process, not results; from firms where partners worked independently (and often competitively), instead of collaborating in the client's best interest; and from work environments where bigger was better and more money trumped more meaningful work. In other words, a completely new business model. The result was a firm with a deep commitment toward its members, clients and, most important, community. Becoming green was a natural outgrowth of the company's community involvement and a reflection of its employees' personal values.

The certification process turned out to be painless. The company discovered it was already doing many of the items on the checklist developed by the Bay Area Certified Green Business program. Of course, it learned many more cost-effective green tactics as it went through the process, thanks to Steve Lederer, director of environmental management for Napa County, who oversees the program in Napa. Now, NewLevel Group is helping others implement environmentally friendly practices in ways that ensure continual success.

### And the Oscar goes to...

When "An Inconvenient Truth" first hit theaters in 2006, there were still some skeptics who questioned whether global warming existed. Two years later, it's hard to find anyone who doesn't believe significant climate change imperils our planet and future.

After viewing this documentary film, I was determined to work on climate protection in my town of St. Helena. I wasn't alone. Coincidentally, Mayor Del Britton and the St. Helena City Council had also decided the time was right for St. Helena to develop a plan of action to address global warming. When they asked for volunteers to form a task force, I was one of the first to step forward. I was appointed, along with Sandra Ericson, a St. Helena planning commissioner, to serve as co-chair. Through the St. Helena Climate Protection Task Force, ours was the first city in Napa County to calculate its carbon footprint. Within its first year, the Task Force had successfully convinced every city in Napa County to develop strategies to protect our climate.

### Ante up

A friendly game of Texas Hold 'Em paved the way for NewLevel's next step along its green journey. During the evening, the conversation turned to what the Climate Protection Task Force was doing in St. Helena. One of the players was involved with a local foundation interested in taking a leading role in climate protection. Introductions were made and like-minded people connected, which contributed to NewLevel Group meeting and eventually working with the Gasser

Foundation to launch the Sustainable Napa County initiative.

NewLevel had already established itself as a leader in the public sector by helping nonprofits and foundations with strategic thinking, board governance and communications. It made sense to combine our passion for the environment with our nonprofit expertise to benefit the Napa community. Sustainable Napa County held its first forum last year to bring together policy makers to begin formulating a sustainability blueprint. Plans continue to evolve with more forums and local policy development planned for the future.

### What's a dog got to do with it?

We have a dog-friendly office with usually at least one canine in residence at any given time. Raffi, a tail-wagging, brown-eyed ball of energy somehow managed to survive Hurricane Katrina and land in the arms of company owners, John and Luisa Heymann. Now the official NewLevel mascot, Raffi's presence constantly reminds us of the toll of increasingly violent natural disasters—caused in part by global warming.

### The continuing saga

One of the commitments a Certified Green Business makes is to help other organizations become green. Although many environmental consultants can advise businesses and nonprofits on the technical aspects of being green—such as how to install energy-saving fixtures or create recycling policies—there was an obvious need that was going unmet: How do you encourage everyone within an organization to consistently practice what's preached?

NewLevel Group developed a Five-Step Program, called "Creating Green Cultures," which addresses behavioral change. For example, one tip is to make sure your team has easy access to the equipment and support they need to accomplish the job. Policies and processes for reducing consumption, recycling and hazardous waste disposal should be easy to understand—and to carry out.

The company has also been tapped by Napa Valley College to produce its first Green Tech Summit, an event designed to promote an understanding of what green technology is, what workforce needs are now and what they're expected to be in the future.

Even if you aren't a film buff, a card player or a dog lover, your organization should consider starting its own green journey. In addition to being a gratifying endeavor, research indicates that people prefer doing business with—and employees prefer working for—organizations that are environmentally friendly and socially responsible. Besides, reducing energy consumption, recycling, and increasing workforce satisfaction all make sense for the bottom line. So, go ahead, take the first step.

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