

IACT to Recognize Communities for Green Efforts

It seems that everywhere we look, we see increased considerations of the impacts that we have on our environment. Even NBC recently dedicated an entire week of programming to “going green.”

Over the last few decades, there have been several surges in public policy with regard to environmental protection. Increased public awareness, spawned in part by a peak in pollution and a book entitled, “*Silent Spring*” ultimately led to the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency by President Nixon in 1970. That same year, Nixon also signed the National Environmental Policy Act, which required formal consideration of the environmental impacts of federally funded projects. Years later, many of us remember the tearful Indian chief on television; and long-term central Indiana residents can recall the “Hudnut Hook” from days gone by in Indianapolis. Both of those public relations campaigns dealt more with littering, but again helped bolster public awareness both nationally and locally.

Concerns for the environment and associated protective measures have presented themselves cyclically throughout the past few decades. A more recent, yet prolific issue is that of climate change. At the same time, there is a significant national move toward sustainable development, green roofs on buildings, energy efficient buildings, green purchasing programs, and green designs for water quality protection. Several Indiana cities are now implementing “green” programs that incorporate such environmentally friendly policies.

Environmental policies are still not completely without controversy, and they remain the subject of political debate. But the focus and interest seems to have hit a point of critical mass, where what were once *cycles* of interest and periodic trends of public attention focused on the environment have now become permanent. Indications are that increased environmental considerations, environmentally protective policies, and business development opportunities driven by environmental needs are no longer temporary trends. Those focused on business, politics, and environmental quality are all discovering more and more in common (Case in point: The business of alternative fuel development alone has blossomed in the last few years, and three very different agendas share a common goal: wean ourselves off of oil for national security, economic health, and the health of the environment.

If the late 1960s and early 1970s signified the birth of environmental awareness in America, then perhaps recent decades have reflected an awkward, if not rebellious teenage period. Recent years, however, seem to signify a coming of age. The issue of environmental consideration has grown up and matured into an intelligent and articulate adult. It is has become ingrained in our everyday thoughts and actions.

Your Indiana Association of Cities and Towns has remained involved in environmental issues for much of its existence. As an advocate for good public policy based upon sound science, IACT has supported good environmental policy that had merit and proven technology, while we have opposed legislation that recklessly applied environmental protection standards that not only did not set realistic or meaningful goals, but also could not be paid for through any reasonable means of public finance. As an advocate for environmental protection, IACT supports public policy that is smart, logical, and is not based simply upon emotion.

IACT has great respect for the need to protect and improve our air, land, and water quality. We also comprehend and promote the importance of the quality of life among our citizens and the economic benefits that can be derived from sound and progressive environmental policies. In fact, IACT is unique among state municipal leagues, as we provide a dedicated Environmental Circuit Rider program. This full-time staff position works hand in hand with state and federal regulators and offers a full-time environmental expert that assists our member municipalities with environmental programs, funding, and regulatory compliance.

IACT is now taking another step toward environmental stewardship, as we embark upon our Green Communities Initiative in 2008. With consideration to the impacts of global population growth, conservation of nonrenewable natural resources, climate change, and other changing environmental factors worldwide, municipalities in Indiana have a vested interest and a responsibility to do their part in appropriate environmental stewardship. Through this new program, IACT will further educate communities on environmental stewardship and provide a program for achievement and recognition in the areas of environmental protection and sustainable development.

As indicated by the popularity of IACT's Annual Awards program, recognition by our peers is momentous. For this reason, IACT considers the recognition of green initiatives by municipalities to be the most meaningful and valuable form of acknowledgment and appreciation.

The IACT Green Communities Initiative will launch in the spring of 2008. The goals will be to improve overall awareness of environmental protection efforts and to motivate peer communities to consider and implement creative environmental management programs. The program will utilize community surveys, local program evaluation, and a public recognition program.

A "green team," made up of IACT-member architects, engineers, and energy conservation experts, are currently preparing a multi-faceted survey. The survey will be customized to Indiana cities and towns, and its completion will help establish a "green score" to the collective environmental efforts of each participating community. The aforementioned "green team" will support the IACT Environmental Circuit Rider and the IACT Ambassadors as they organize and administer this honor system-based survey of local government management strategies that go above and beyond regulatory requirements and are implemented for the protection of the environment and natural resources.

In association with this survey program will be a statewide recognition and awards program for participating municipalities who meet specified criteria. Awards for the first IACT Green Communities will be presented in late 2008.

The community survey and recognition program will be voluntary and will only occur in communities that have requested participation through the highest ranking elected official of that community. The survey portion of the program will not address regulatory requirements, violations, or permit status, and will focus solely on voluntary efforts of the municipality. The program will be administered by the Environmental Circuit Rider and the IACT Ambassadors. "Blind" assistance with surveys and judging will be offered by the green team. Additionally,

IACT will complement the program with the increased provision of environmentally-focused presentations, workshops, and the sharing of municipal case studies.

For more information on the program contact the IACT Environmental Circuit Rider Bill Goffinet at bgoffinet@citiesandtowns.org or (317) 237-6200 or Green Team member Josh Goode at jgoode@cbbel-in.com.