



Green Conscience LLC

Karen Totino

Success Magazine: Karen, What is Green Conscience, LLC?

Karen Totino: Green Conscience is a retail showroom that features non-toxic and sustainable interior finishes, lawn and garden products, and lifestyle goods.

SM: Why did you choose to work in the “green” field?

KT: My formal education is in occupational therapy, however, I am a very passionate organic gardener and always wanted my own business. It was a dream of mine until I was prompted into action one day walking my children in a wagon around the block. I noticed that the DPW had spray painted above each storm drain “Discharges to Stream,” which is the Kayderosseras Creek, and right next to the drains were little yellow signs from chemical lawn care companies. For me, it was a light bulb moment so to speak. The following spring I launched Green Conscience Organic Lawn Care. For the next four years that followed, I truly enjoyed working with people on caring for their land and making a difference in the way they approached landscaping.

SM: How did you choose to go from a green lawn care service to owning and developing your own retail store?

KT: I saw a greater need for products that would create not only a non-toxic landscape but also a non-toxic interior. By having the retail store I can offer the whole spectrum of goods and services, as well as have a platform for the education that is the necessary first step in many cases. Throughout my career, either as an occupational therapist, lawn care operator or store owner, my passion has always been educating and inspiring people to make better choices for themselves and the environment.

SM: What products does your store sell?

KT: We carry non-toxic zero VOC paint, plaster, flooring, counter tops, beds and mattresses, organic fertilizers and soil amendments, energy saving products like low flow showerheads, tank-less water heaters and insulation. We also carry unique gift items from local artisans.

SM: How will these products help our community?

KT: These eco-friendly products will help create healthier environments for ourselves and our children that will sustain well-being. Most standard building and interior materials contribute to chronic conditions such as allergies and asthma, and their outgassing can make us sick. On a larger scale, the use of such products will promote sustainable behavior that will better conserve the planet’s resources.

SM: What products do you plan to sell within the next year?

KT: The store opened in June of 2009, so I missed a good portion for the lawn and garden season last year. One major focus this year will be an array of products for the lawn and garden including organic fertilizers, organic seedling kits for starting your own small garden, planters made with sustainable materials, and composters...among other things!

SM: How are you promoting the opening of your new store with the green community?

KT: I am using traditional advertising methods along with social networking avenues. The store also hosts regular free presentations with professional speakers. In the last five months, we’ve had talks on natural landscaping, solar energy, soy foam insulation, tank-less hot water heaters, and saving energy with energy audits. These presentations will continue throughout 2010. We are also planning to be available once a month to help people with their green design questions.

SM: As a new entrepreneur, how did you finance the opening of your new store?

KT: I used a combination of my own savings and a SBA loan.

SM: How critical are your business and market plan in formulating your future?



KT: Absolutely critical. If you don’t know where you’ve been, where you are and want to go, you are wandering aimlessly. As a business owner you have to keep a clear vision of what you want to accomplish and have a plan to achieve it.

SM: What does your five year plan include?

KT: I ultimately want to have a showroom with some warehouse space so I can expand my offerings. I also see my business as one piece of a larger whole, and would like to create a network of businesses that would provide a full-spectrum of services under one roof. It would make things much easier for customers.

SM: What would a successful day be to you?

KT: A successful day has always been when I am able to help someone with a problem, providing not only a solution, but peace of mind that comes with making the right choice. I also love when I offer ideas that haven’t been considered and they have a light bulb moment of their own!



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