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Theresa Lehman column: Economy may be slowing, but green keeps growing

The current economy has many area businesses and homeowners looking at their budgets to figure out a way to save every penny they can.

There is a perception that implementing green practices costs money, when viewed in terms of lifecycle actually saves money. Now, more than ever, is the time to implement green measures and change behaviors to save money, lessen our impact on the environment, and improve the quality of our health and well being.

It's an exciting time for those of us emerged in the world of sustainability. And, with the recent change in administration, the importance of green in our society is growing to a point where it is becoming a common household term. At the heart of President Obama's economic recovery plan is the creation of \$5 million green-collar jobs in the next 10 years, and right now, the industry falls short of people who are knowledgeable on renewable energy design, installation and operation and maintenance of these types of systems and equipment. These jobs will help stimulate the economy both in the short term as well as the long run, not to mention will reduce our impact on the environment.

What proof do we have on the need for these types of jobs? One example is that the Public Service Commission currently requires utility companies to provide 20 percent of the power they sell from renewable energy sources by the year 2020; President Obama intends to accelerate this schedule requiring that the utilities provide 10 percent by 2010 and 25 percent by 2025. As a result, our utility companies are offering many incentives for businesses and homeowners to increase the energy efficiency of their facilities and homes as well as install renewable energy systems. Please contact your local utility or Focus on Energy for information on these incentives.

In addition, the House has passed the current legislation as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, currently in the hands of the Senate, intended to encourage economic growth by creating jobs in America and investing in the education of America's children by providing funding for green school modernization, renovation and repair of K-12 schools, higher education, and government projects. The act also includes many federal and state tax incentives for businesses and homeowners who invest in energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.

We are living in a time when undertaking green initiatives is not viewed as an extra expense, but seen as acting on our shared social responsibility. The benefits of going green are proving to have a short payback period, and save all of us money in the long run.

Green design, construction and operations are on the rise. Technology is advancing every day. We must continue to stress the importance of eliminating waste. How can

you reduce waste, increase energy efficiency, allocate resources more wisely?

By investing in energy efficient homes and businesses, owners can save money in the years and decades that lie ahead. By investing in wind, solar or other renewable energy sources, we can create jobs that will stimulate the economy and teach ourselves, as well as our children, about responsible social behavior, and at the same time, deal with the causes that contribute to climate change. By incorporating the values of social responsibility into our businesses and daily lives, we can do our part to stimulate the economy and increase the green in our pockets.
