

# Lyons Environmental Sustainability

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Lyons has always been known for its rich history, quiet small-town appeal, gorgeous sandstone rocks, abundant recreational opportunities, and active arts and music community. But lately Lyons has been gaining a reputation of a different color... namely, green. Over the last several years, thanks to the efforts of a few organizations and a committed and active citizenry, Lyons has positioned itself on the leading edge of the sustainability movement.

One of the innovators of sustainability in our community has been Planet Bluegrass, a world-renowned concert and festival venue tucked along the banks of the St. Vrain River. In 2002, long before going green became the “in thing” to do, they made a commitment to reduce their environmental impact because they felt it was the “right thing” to do. Since then they’ve become a leader in the field by reducing their waste, exploring energy efficiency, doing away with plastic water bottles, providing local and organic foods to folks backstage, switching to electronic tickets, and offsetting the travel emissions of their performers and participants, making them the first carbon neutral festival in the world.

In 2005 The Stone Cup Café and Gallery followed suit by adopting a mission to become an environmentally-friendly business that also educates its customers about what they can do to “go green” as well. To that end the Stone Cup employs compostable products, local vendors, energy efficient lighting, non-toxic cleansers, organic fair trade coffee, and carbon offsets. Another one of our area’s sustainability pioneers is Stonebridge Farm, a community supported farm (CSA) founded in 1993 and located just over the town line in Longmont. Not only does Stonebridge grow organic veggies, flowers, and herbs for its members, they also have a deep commitment to environmental stewardship, community involvement, and teaching the public about the importance of organic agriculture and eating local.

A big boost to the town’s green activities came in 2007 when the StEPP Foundation received \$450,000 from a settlement with the nearby cement plant regarding allegations of air pollution violations. These monies were then distributed to three organizations tasked with coordinating local sustainability projects in different sectors of Lyons. The Brendle Group and the PACE Partners are working with local businesses to help them identify and complete capital projects that will increase their energy efficiency and decrease their carbon emissions. The Center for Resource Conservation developed an interactive educational program and energy assessment for the middle/high school that will culminate with the installation of solar photovoltaic panels on the roof of the building.

And, the Green Heart Institute offered a Community Initiative for 150 families that trained local volunteers to become Sustainability Mentors who worked one-on-one with residents to teach them how to reduce their environmental impact. To date, Green Heart’s holistic measurement, education, and tracking program has helped participants lower their carbon footprint by 17% as compared to the year before, and resulted in a savings of nearly 325,000 pounds of carbon dioxide. In partnership with the Lyons Farmette, a new organic educational farm in town, Green Heart has also helped raise awareness and support skill-building by sponsoring many exciting classes about sustainable living.

The Green Heart Institute’s successes were featured in the “Going Green” special produced by Denver’s Channel 7 News on Earth Day in both 2008 and 2009. The shows highlighted the commitment of local volunteers and families, and in 2008 also featured a new initiative by the

Lyons Area Chamber of Commerce. As a part of their monthly member meetings, the Chamber made a commitment to make these events “zero waste” by composting or recycling all of the plates, cups, and utensils that were used. They also created a sustainability resource page on their website, offered a Green Business seminar to the public, provided easy access to Eco-Cycle’s Zero Waste kits, and sponsored a Buy Local Contest over the holidays.

Inspired by what they learned during Green Heart Institute’s Homeowner Orientation and fueled by a deep commitment of their own, two local entrepreneurs created Lyons ReRuns, a small thrift store in town that helps residents save money and keep usable items from heading off to the landfill. Proceeds from the shop go to the Lyons Community Foundation who then reinvests those funds in projects that directly benefit residents. They’re not the only women who have taken things into their own hands to benefit the town and the earth. Two Lyons moms saw a need for safer commuting routes for local youth, and decided to create a new nonprofit called Ped and Pedal Lyons. Not only did they get the grant for the crosswalk they wanted, they also organized Lyons’ first Ped and Pedal to School Day to encourage alternative transportation and fitness amongst students, parents, and staff.

Several other moms and dads put in a whole lot of sweat equity to build vegetable plots and a Garden-to-Table program at Lyons Elementary School so that children could learn more about nutrition, understand where their food comes from, and eat fresh salads for lunch. This project complements their designation as an Eco-Cycle Green Star school, meaning they are one of seventeen other institutions who have committed to improving environmental awareness and reducing waste by making sure that all food service items are either reusable, recyclable, or compostable.

Another school committed to encouraging environmental stewardship is Lyons Community Montessori. They organize an annual Earth Day event along with the Green Heart Institute that features music, arts and crafts, educational booths, local vendors, and activities for the kids.

Lyons also earned a bit of fame in August of 2008 for its environmental efforts when it received its official designation as a “Transition Town,” making it only the 4th of its kind in the U.S. and the 92nd in the world. Transition Towns are communities around the globe who are dedicated to building local resilience and improved quality of life by developing deliberate action plans to address the intersecting challenges of peak oil, climate change, and economic instability. This volunteer-driven movement raises awareness and builds skills for increased self-sufficiency and sustainability by organizing community gatherings and educational events for residents.

Lyons is also home to a “Built-Green” sustainable neighborhood called Lyons Valley Village, which features energy-efficient design, renewable and recycled materials, and solar hot water systems.

The town government has also done its part to help Lyons go green by signing onto Boulder County’s Sustainable Energy Plan, an action-orientated commitment providing strategic support to municipalities for reducing their greenhouse gas emissions. To see this commitment through, the Board of Trustees established a Sustainable Future Commission charged with implementing the practices and policies outlined in the plan and improving the overall environmental stewardship of the town and its citizens. The town also donated some of its land for the creation of a local and organic community garden for residents in which over 50 families have a garden plot.

It takes a lot of cooperation to move swiftly down that good green road and the community of Lyons is setting a great example for what's possible when we all work together. It has become a place where you can not only enjoy its beautiful small town environment, but you can also join others who are passionate about ensuring that it stays that way for generations to come.