

# Edmonds Sustainability Heroes

## Walnut Street Coffee



*(On June 10, 2015, Jim Stevens, member of the Mayor's Climate Protection Committee of Edmonds interviewed Pam Stuller, the owner of Walnut Street Coffee, to learn more about her successes in increasing sustainability at her shop located in Edmonds at 410 Walnut St. The following article describes her motivations, efforts, and results achieved.)*

About nine years ago Pam Stuller opened the doors at Walnut Street Coffee, and it began the same way many such businesses run, with coffee and food served in disposable containers. A self-professed lover of coffee and its community, Pam had been working in the business for some time previously. However, it was not until she was the proprietor herself before her eyes opened to the large volume of waste her business was producing. Her concern over how she contributed to landfills drove her instead to serve coffee using ceramic mugs and compostable cups, as well as to offer a discount to customers supplying their own containers. Where she had required disposal services for a one-yard container emptied weekly, she now produces just a small tote of landfill material in the same time.

The other change that she has embraced resulted from her understanding of the volume of milk passing through her shop. She decided to start using certified organic milk to ensure that her sources for this essential supply had antibiotic and growth hormone-free herds that were pasture grazed and fed grain or grass not treated with any pesticides. Ultimately she made this change because she believes it is the right thing to do for her customers as well as for the dairy herds supplying this product.

Switching to organic milk and moving to compostable products did cost considerably more than using traditional products, but Pam knew it was the right move, even if the cups cost an additional 40% and the milk was 50% more. Her strategy was not to simply pass this cost on to the consumer, because she knew she could both make the ends meet and satisfy her desire to do the right thing. She readily admits that she is fortunate to have a robust business that allows her to make these changes.

Of course, she has also made energy-efficiency improvements. We did not have a tough time picking out that one of the spotlights over our chairs was an LED. The non-negotiable in this equation is directly related to making coffee because the laws of physics demand a sufficient energy input to produce hot water. Yet, she remains open to making additional changes to enhance the improvements she has already made, and a small solar array to power her lighting was one of the things she mentioned. She does work to let customers know about her efforts, but she also knows that some people just want a cup of coffee. She sees the value of providing good coffee and good service to enable her to do the right things and lead by her example. Her words echo many of the other voices that we have heard while conducting these interviews. "Start small and do the things you can, because the small things really do make a difference."

Before it became Walnut Street Coffee, the building was operated as a flower shop. Rather than knock down the building and start over to build a new coffee shop, Pam chose to work within the existing structure and reuse as much as practical. The roll-up door on the street side is a good example of something that suited the flower shop now being put to use on nice days to provide additional ventilation and to open up the shop to sidewalk traffic. This reuse of an existing structure by making limited and targeted changes also reflects her attitude of doing things sustainably, by working with what one has rather than relentlessly tearing down and starting anew.

Pam credits her love of the outdoors and nature for the basis of her commitment to sustainability. At one time she worked for the Nature Conservancy. But it is really her concern for the environment and her belief that we can all make a difference by taking better care of what we have been given that motivates her. Again, the small things truly do matter. Ask Pam.