

[back to article](#)

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Company's green initiative spreads

By Robert Palmer,
Staff Writer

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Environmentally friendly alternatives to traditional manufacturing processes and business operations are discussed constantly, but putting those principles into practice isn't always the end result.

But one company in Florence is partnering with the city and other businesses to put green practices into operation in a cost-friendly way that ultimately adds to bottom lines.

Thomas Trissl, a native of Germany, started Centiva vinyl floor products 14 years ago on Mars Hill Road in a former floor products plant.

Today, it is touted as one of the most efficient and environmentally friendly manufacturing facilities in the world. And Trissl is sharing not only his enthusiasm for earth-friendly initiatives, he is sharing some of the techniques used by his company.

"In Germany, energy is very expensive. Gasoline is \$6 a gallon," he said. "So, we realized we must change our habits. By doing so, the savings at the end turn into profits."

Trissl and his director of production, Garth Gaffney, have gone through the Centiva plant with a fine-tooth comb in the past three years to eliminate as much waste as possible, which includes reusing scrap and trimmings from tiles. Water and steam are recycled constantly inside the plant, equipment has been scaled down to fit specific processes, lighting has been adjusted with sensors, and heating and cooling is carefully controlled with fans. The changes and innovations are so pervasive throughout the plant that Gaffney can spend hours talking about them.

Trissl is so passionate about green initiatives that he approached city officials two years ago about expanding what he is doing. That meeting led to the city creating the Certified Green Team Partnership program, which encourages businesses and nonprofit organizations to adopt a checklist of green practices. To date, American Wholesale Books, Firenze Gifts and Interiors, Shoals Children's Museum, Sara Lee, Shoals Web, Residence Inn and Robin Wade Furniture have joined the team.

"We realized we could do this within our city," said Rachel Mansell, education outreach manager for the Florence recycling program. "All these things are cost

Mansell said the water department has started a green team to establish the practices, and what is learned there will be applied across city departments.

“They helped motivate us,” Mayor Bobby Irons said of Centiva. “Thomas Trissl was one of the first to take action in his company to show he means business.”

Irons said he wants to tie some of the green team innovations to an expanded recycling program that he hopes will lead to doubling amount of material collected and diverted from the city landfill.

For details about the program, visit florencegoesgreen.org.

Robert Palmer can be reached at 256-740-5720 or robert.palmer@TimesDaily.com.

