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Multifilm first business to make Elgin's sustainability honor roll

By MIKE DANAHEY
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Multifilm

Multifilm Packaging COO David Rohrschneider and company president Chris Rogers (right) stand in front of the regenerative thermal oxidizer at the company's Multifoil facility in Elgin. The system drastically cuts the amount of volatile organic compounds released into the air. (Mike Danahey / The Courier-News)

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Multifilm Packaging Corporation was named to Elgin's Sustainability Commission's honor roll, which recognizes green efforts across the city.

"This was the first business to make the honor roll," Mayor Dave Kaptain said.

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Molly Center, Elgin's staff liaison to the commission, said the honor is to be bestowed every six months. The 9-member commission decides whom to recognize, and residents are welcome to nominate candidates online at cityofelgin.org/greenaward.

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environmental projects with various organizations.

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"With Multifilm, the (sustainability) moves they have made show a commitment to remaining a part of Elgin," Kaptain said. "The payback on their investments will happen over years. And ultimately it will add to their bottom line."

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Thursday Multifilm President Chris Rogers and Chief Operating Officer David Rohrschneider gave a tour of the company's facility at southwest corner of McLean Boulevard and Big Timber Road. The management-owned firm also owns and operates the close-by, related business, Multifoil, at 1700 Big Timber Road.

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The company specializes in flexible packaging for the food, beverage and confectionery industries with products that include twist wraps, flow wraps, bag and pouch film, both single web and laminates. Customers include Hershey, Godiva and Ferrara Candy, Rogers said.

"Since 2008 (when management bought Multifilm from its prior owner), the company has tripled in size and made an investment of more than \$20 million in its operations," Rogers said.

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One of those investments was putting in a geothermal system, which uses water pumped in from four supply wells to cool equipment and, in summer, for air conditioning. Energy-efficient boilers are used when the building needs to be heated.

The system filters water from the 350-feet deep wells, which is eventually returned to the ground.

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"With the geothermal system, about one-third of our energy bill went away," Rogers said.

Since 2011, Multifilm Packaging has been adhering to "zero-waste-to-landfill" practices, the men said. As such, the company's website notes about half of Multifilm's plastic scrap is used to make storage boxes. Material that cannot be recycled is made into pellets and sent to incineration plants that burn them for energy.

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To cut down on its liquid waste, Multifilm uses a solvent distillation system which converts most of the liquid back into that which can be used again. The men said that with this system, what used to produce 20 barrels of waste now produces just one.

Rogers noted that while the company operates to turn a profit and to provide good jobs, there are limited resources, which can be extended through recycling and other efficiency efforts.

"Sustainability practices are always the right thing to do, for the environment and for business," Rogers said.

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Romischneider said that the price of materials to make wrappers and other Multifilm products has risen dramatically over the last decade, so sustainability practices make economic sense.

Both men noted that along with the moves they have made to make their operations more green and energy efficient, improvements in the polymers have resulted in thinner material, which translates into less material being used, less scrap, and because of items being lighter, lesser transportation costs.

Kaptain said that the company's vision fits in well with the city's own sustainability goals.

As for the city's own recent sustainability-related efforts, Center said projects include teaming with Waste Management on informing residents how the company's recycling collection program works, promoting solar energy options and working to build more community gardens on empty city lots. The city is hosting a family-oriented sustainability fair at Hawthorne Hill Nature Center Friday, Earth Day, from 4 to 7 p.m.

"Our big focus is education, in general, about things people can do toward sustainability," Center said.

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