

Green-collar jobs growing in Northeast Ohio

by Peter Krouse

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## GREEN INC.

A monthly look at companies embracing sustainability

How do you define a "green" job?



*Tracy Boulian/The Plain Dealer: Jessica and Mike Matisz check out the composite decking, an environmentally friendly material, on a house in Cleveland's Tremont neighborhood. Realtor Carolyn Bentley, a certified EcoBroker with Howard Hanna, showed the home.*

In its purest sense, a green job is an occupation that wouldn't exist if not for the growing movement to conserve resources and make businesses more environmentally conscious.

Something like a sustainable practices coordinator at a large corporation. Or maybe a person who analyzes wind conditions to see if they're ripe for spinning turbine blades.

More broadly, a green job also is a traditional vocation carried out in support of a green purpose. An accountant at a company that makes solar panels. An electrician who installs solar panels

when not performing routine wiring jobs.

But if the definition of a green job is hard to get your hands around, the ability to land one shouldn't be, especially in Cleveland, where industries as diverse as farming, renewable energy and an emerging business called deconstruction show promise.

Even those at the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder are expected to join the movement, thanks to a program under development at Cuyahoga Community College.

While the hype around green jobs has focused largely on the wind energy industry, scads of green jobs have evolved in other areas, too, often through an individual's own initiative.

Carolyn Bentley, 32, found a way to enter the traditional workforce on green terms. She and her husband have experience renovating homes with green touches, but after reading

an article in This Old House magazine, she decided to become a real estate agent -- with a twist.

#### **Green jobs**

##### **Looking for a green job?**

**Entrepreneurs for Sustainability might be able to help. Its Web site offers a green jobs listing. Go to the "What's New" heading and click on "Post your green jobs on our online forum." Then click on "Post your green jobs" to view the listings. To post a listing, you must first register and log in at the bottom of the page.**

**The jobs list, which is specific to sustainable business, has been up less than month and has already received more than 1,900 hits. That's pretty significant, given that E4S has not mounted a campaign to promote the listing, said Stephanie Strong, director of learning programs at E4S.**

**Also, GreenCityBlueLake Institute, a department of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History, offers a green jobs listing. The listing is for anyone to use but the jobs are more focused on the green non-profit sector, said Marc Lefkowitz, Web editor at the institute. To list on the site you can sign up for a free user account on the home page and post the listing yourself, or e-mail Lefkowitz the job information.**

**-- Peter Krouse**

Bentley paid \$400 to complete an Internet course and become a certified EcoBroker. She's one of five so designated in the state. She plies her passion for Howard Hanna in Cleveland, working with sellers to highlight the green features in their homes or with buyers to find homes that are environmentally friendly.

And Mark Centea, 47, hopes his occupation will take on a greenish tint. He's engineering manager at the Akron Rubber Development Laboratory Inc. While his lab has engaged in earth-friendly projects, such as helping clients produce recycled rubber for playgrounds, Centea wants to do more.

He wants to hook up with customers looking for green answers. Maybe a project to create biodegradable plastic.

Progress on such fronts wouldn't create many jobs for the Akron Rubber Development Laboratory, Centea said, but it could mean openings in research. Positions that might meld biology with technology to create products that are not only durable but easy and safe to reuse or recycle when their original purpose comes to an end.

It's not so much that more green jobs are being created as it is that existing jobs are becoming greener, said Jim LaRue, 71, a retired building investigator who teaches green construction

techniques in the Cleveland area.

One exception might be the deconstruction business. Deconstruction is the careful razing of buildings so materials like wood, wiring and block can be reused instead of being dumped in a landfill. The Cleveland Foundation is paying for a demonstration project in which two foreclosed homes in Cleveland will be dismantled by hand.

Some have already caught on. A local company called A Piece of Cleveland takes salvaged wood and fashions it into furniture, complete with a "rebirth" certificate.

Opportunities for green jobs can be found at either end of the technological spectrum, from farming to advanced energy.

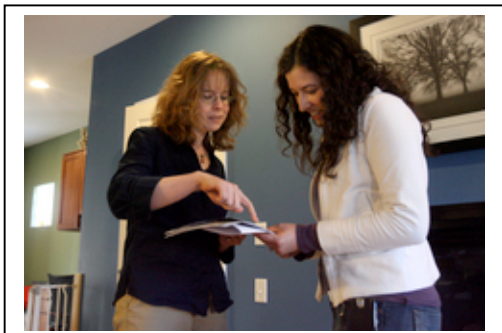
At the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster, Ohio State associate professor Joe Kovach is studying the best way to create revenue-producing gardens. He has planted tall crops beside short crops, fruits beside vegetables, late bloomers with early bloomers, all in an effort to design a more stable ecosystem that would need a minimum of sprays and chemicals.

His research so far suggests a grower can produce \$90,000 worth of fruits and vegetables in a year on one acre of land, presuming it's all sold locally and without the cost of transportation. It's the kind of research that should aid those interested in turning vacant land into market gardens.

Also doing its part to create a green workforce is Tri-C, where Leo Russo hopes to roll out a program to train the poor and the unemployed to work in green-related jobs. It's a concept developed by a San Francisco State University professor.

The goal is to enroll 150 students in the first wave, said Leo Russo, who heads construction trades training at the college, and to train them in four concentrations: energy efficiency, deconstruction, solar power and wind energy technology.

Energy efficiency would include training in weatherproofing homes, installing more-efficient heating and air conditioning units and making other structural improvements. Solar power participants would become certified to assist more-experienced electricians in the installation of solar panels. Wind energy technology training would involve learning how to operate machines to make turbine components.



*Tracy Boulian/The Plain Dealer: Carolyn Bentley, left, explains some of the energy-efficient features of a Tremont house to Michelle Yu during an open house. Bentley is a certified EcoBroker with Howard Hanna.*

The curriculum would include basic math and reading as it relates to their potential jobs, as well as technical skills such as using hand tools and reading blueprints or municipal codes.

Supportive government policy will be critical to the creation of green jobs, said Richard Stuebi of the Cleveland Foundation. The state's new energy bill provides some of that. It calls for 12.5 percent of electricity sold by investor-owned utilities by 2025 to be obtained from renewable sources. Half of that 12.5 percent must come from sources in the state.

That bodes well for construction jobs as turbines and electrical distribution lines are added, and for manufacturing as companies make wind-related components in the area.

That growth is already happening.

Ed Weston of the Great Lakes Wind Network said that a number of companies are engaged in making components for wind turbines and that many are starving for workers. The jobs pay well, too, up to \$15 an hour with benefits.

"What's available now in manufacturing are careers, green careers," he said.

The jobs involve the production of castings, machined precision parts and forged and welded components. And they are likely to be secure because the parts being made are large and heavy -- things like gears, gearbox housings and large bearings that would be expensive to ship in from other countries.

Weston estimates there are 50 to 100 such openings now in Northeast Ohio.

"The wind industry is here to stay," he said. "It's only going to get bigger."