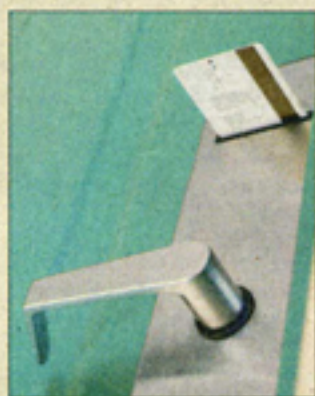


Talk of  
the bayRESERVATIONS  
ABOUT BOOKING  
ROOMS ONLINE

It's hardly news that consumers overwhelmingly hunt for travel bargains on the Web and most often buy online. But there's a wrinkle to the trend. When it comes to buying a hotel room, fewer people are making their purchases by pointing and clicking. A survey of Pinellas County visitors in August found that 97 percent got information for their trip on the Internet and 84 percent bought travel there. But 62 percent booked rooms online, down from 71 percent a year earlier. Consumers are pickier about their hotel room than the airline seat or rental car. They want to hear a real person confirm specifics such as the waterfront view, says Walter Klages of Research Data Services in Tampa, which conducted the survey. His researchers are hearing the same from tourists in other parts of Florida.


Tests ease job of  
hiring managers

Any hiring manager will tell you that a diploma and a resume are no guarantee a person can do a job. So the state has recently launched a free program called Florida Ready to Work to help businesses take the guesswork out of hiring and to give job seekers a way to prove they're worth employing. To earn the Ready to Work credentials, job seekers must take exams in Applied Mathematics, Reading for Information and Locating Information at a participating technical center, work force center or similar location. The tests were developed by the company that administers the ACT, and each lasts about an hour. The program offers an optional assessment measuring attitude, behavior and customer service skills, as well as online courses to help job seekers build skills. Learn more at [www.floridareadytowork.com](http://www.floridareadytowork.com) or by calling toll-free 1-866-429-2334.



Chairs are waiting to be displayed in the new Ikea store in Orlando.

## MONEY


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BE

## Rooting for green



Compared to other parts of the country, Tampa Bay isn't exactly eco-friendly, but a few crusaders are issuing the challenge to take better care of our planet.

BY CHRISTINA REXRODE  
Times Staff Writer

Going green  
grows greenbacks

Why are more businesses bothering to be environmentally friendly? Here's why:

**IT CAN SAVE MONEY**, though it usually requires an initial investment. Clearwater's Tech Data Corp. recently spent \$300,000 to outfit a California logistics facility with fluorescent lights that the company says will pay for themselves in nine months. In Oldsmar, the Nielsen Co. saves on air conditioning because its blinds automatically lower during the hottest parts of the day.

**IT CAN BE GOOD PUBLICITY.** Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott acknowledged the company's environmental push started out as a "defensive strategy" to polish a rough corporate image.

**THE GOVERNMENT REWARDS AND MANDATES IT.** Through last year's Energy Policy Act, the federal government rewards corporations with tax credits for installing solar energy systems, buying hybrid vehicles and making their buildings more energy efficient. In Florida, the state's 2006 Energy Act rebates corporations up to \$100,000 for solar photovoltaic systems and \$5,000 for solar water-heating systems.

**THE RULES ONLY GET TOUGHER.** Gov. Charlie Crist's executive orders this summer to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will likely influence every industry in the state. Florida companies — especially utilities — might appear suddenly interested in the environment because they want to shape those policies rather than let government do it for them, said Paul Sotkiewicz, director of energy studies at the University of Florida's Public Utility Research Center.

Christina Rexrode,  
Times staff writer

It was only a small victory, but it was hard won.

Nicole Kibert, a 31-year-old real estate lawyer with a long-running interest in the environment, was purging her firm, Carlton Fields, of its Styrofoam.

"And seriously," said Kibert, who is one of about 100 lawyers in Carlton's Tampa office, "it was a big, huge deal. You would not believe the debates."

With some lawyerly coaxing, Kibert eventually wrested the landfill-clogging substance from her colleagues, who now swig their coffee from biodegradable "eco cups" or ceramic mugs.

For the global green movement, that's the tiniest of triumphs. But in the Tampa Bay area, that's enough to make Carlton Fields a green leader. Elsewhere, appearing environmentally responsible might be a hot corporate trend, but here, many companies are hard-pressed to think of green initiatives they've undertaken.

"I know we've talked about it for a while," said Nicole Andriso, a spokeswoman for St. Petersburg's Catalina Marketing.

"I don't know if I'm going to be much help for you," said Diane Rose, a rep for Syniverse Technologies in Tampa.

Among Tampa Bay businesses, going green is going slowly.

## Big-money firms lead way

There are plenty of theories about why. For one, the green business pep rally is being led by deep-pocketed Fortune 500 corporations — an asset the Tampa Bay area is largely lacking.

Think Wal-Mart, which has practically taken a religious vow to reduce waste and save electricity. DuPont and Dow Chemical have executives designated as "chief sustainability officers." And GE recently unveiled a credit card whose reward points pay for renewable energy research. All are Fortune 100 companies, with plenty of staffers to devote to finding out how to be socially responsible, and plenty of money to carry out those missives.

Not only do the corporate giants have more resources to put toward greenness, they have more to gain from doing

» See GREEN, 5D

» GREEN continued from 1D

# Hope is baby steps become leaps to progress

so. Since they're under a higher level of public scrutiny, they have a better chance of parlaying their green efforts into good publicity.

Clive Roux, founder of an environmental consulting firm in Atlanta called Green LLC, theorizes that Florida is behind on the green curve because it's dominated by the service industry. Service companies produce less waste and use less energy than manufacturers, so they've been slower to embrace green practices.

"There was a lot less to be saved," suggests Roux.

## Slow to adapt

Others say companies here just haven't bothered to learn the benefits of going green, or are stuck in their Earth-averse ways.

Outdated thinking can be a daunting hurdle to even simple changes. Kibert, the Styrofoam searcher-and-destroyer at Carlton Fields, hears colleagues say computers lose power if they're shut down each night.

"Well," said Kibert, "that was true in the '80s."

Citigroup, which in May said it would commit an impressive \$50-billion to green projects over the next decade, couldn't even turn up the thermostat in its Tampa operations center without stirring up employee unrest. Last November, managers cranked it up from 72 to 78 degrees. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, they turned it down after staffers kept complaining.

When leaders at Bovis Lend Lease, an eco-friendly, Australian contracting firm, tried to set up recycling bins for glass and aluminium at their Tampa office, the landlord told them they weren't allowed to.

Being green "is kind of hard here," said Brandon Thompson, the office's sustainability ambassador. Though his office has undertaken a number of green initiatives —

*"I'm not saying everything's a cakewalk, but what is our local leadership doing?"*

**Sean Brennan**, founder, Tampa Bay Green Drinks

like its goal by 2009 to get all Tampa employees LEED-certified, meaning they know how to design and operate environmentally friendly buildings — Thompson (the only Tampa employee with the certification) is frustrated that branches in places like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles seem so far ahead.

At least Bovis has asked its roughly 60 Tampa employees to take their soda cans home with them.

## State shows promise

On the state level, green advocates say Gov. Charlie Crist and his early green actions show promise. But the Tampa Bay area lacks the leaders to encourage and mandate green practices.

"I'm not saying everything's a cakewalk, but what is our local leadership doing?" said Sean Brennan, who last year founded Tampa Bay Green Drinks, a networking group for business people interested in sustainability. "Show it to me."

Brennan, 36, moved from New York, where he admired Mayor Michael Bloomberg's green efforts. New York, like Los Angeles, has ambitious plans to cut greenhouse emissions by a third over the next two decades.

Such green initiatives are also a result of the geography. When Anne Elliot moved from the Nielsen Co.'s New York offices a year and a half ago to its 1,800-employee operation in Oldsmar, she was surprised there weren't recycling bins for



DANIEL WALLACE | Times

## She objects to lack of environmental awareness

Lawyer Nicole Kibert heads the green program at the Carlton Fields law firm in Tampa. In February, Kibert helped launch a sustainability campaign at the firm called CF Goes Green. Among its objectives: reducing waste, switching to Energy Star electronics and participating in environmental cleanups. "We're trying to unlearn some bad habits," she said, "like 'I'm entitled to use 12 (disposable) coffee cups a day.' Well, you may be entitled, but is that a good decision?" The real estate lawyer also is working to make Carlton Fields a member of the EPA's Green Power Partnership. To qualify, companies must buy green credits proportional to their annual energy use. The credits pay for renewable energy research.

aluminium and plastic.

In New York, she said, where "you're living on top of each other, you have to be a little more aware of those things. Moving New York's trash is a huge issue."

The company has since set up those bins.

## Cost considerations

For all its shortcomings, the Tampa Bay area's green movement shows some signs of life.

In May, Tampa's TECO Energy switched from diesel to biodiesel for its service vehicles, and introduced four

hybrid Ford Escapes to its 700-vehicle fleet.

That's a humble beginning, acknowledges Donald Moore, TECO's fleet services manager. But to buy the more-expensive hybrids, he has to prove to his bosses the fuel savings area a sound investment.

"We can't just go out and spend inappropriately," Moore said.

"That's not going to be beneficial to our customer base."

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