

CHEERS TO THE PLANET

By Susan Thurston

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Over pints of Guinness and pale ale, the plotting begins.

How can we build more houses that create as much energy as they consume?

How can we get more companies to think beyond recycling?

Sobering stuff for around a bar table. But that's the idea. Get the community talking about environmental-friendly issues in a relaxed, social setting.

It goes like this. Greenies from all kinds of industries get together at a bar once a month to brainstorm and network. They call it Green Drinks.

Sean Brennan started Tampa Bay Green Drinks last year to get local conversations going. The group meets the third Wednesday of every month at MacDinton's Irish Pub & Restaurant. Another Green Drinks group meets the third Friday of every month at the Fly Bar & Restaurant in downtown Tampa.

Attendees range from architects to engineers to real estate agents to interior designers. Every month someone new shows up. Last month it was a couple starting a solar energy company. This month it was a guy interested in making houses from storage containers.

The group has no set agenda. Talk flows with the beer, and it's not unusual for the regular bar crowd to jump into the chatter.

Nelson DeLaRosa came to talk up storage container houses, which are hurricane and termite resistant. He also pitched plans for homes with sod-covered roofs that capture rainwater and lightweight solar panels.

Maybe he'd find an architect and engineer to make it happen.

Maybe he'd just meet some people who think like he does.

Members make no promises to change the world. It's just an opportunity to connect, share



Luis Santana/tbt*

Sean Brennan and Nelson DeLaRosa plot to save the environment at MacDinton's Irish Pub in Tampa.

Get connected, go green

Green Drinks meets the third Friday of every month, including tonight (9/21), from 5 to 7 p.m. at Fly Bar & Restaurant, 1202 E Franklin St. in Tampa. Email: greendrinkstampa@gmail.com. Another group, Tampa Bay Green Drinks, meets the third Wednesday of every month starting at 6 p.m. at MacDinton's Irish Pub & Restaurant, 405 S Howard Ave. in Tampa. Email: tampabay-greendrinks@gmail.com.

and possibly influence.

"Sustainability is a complicated subject," said Tom Szumlic, an architect who teaches environmental design at the Art Institute of Tampa. "It's not just about green."

It's about changing mindsets, he said, and designing communities that give rather than take from the environment.

Eileen Thornton is the director of sustainability for Newland Communities, which built Fish-

Hawk Ranch and other master-planned neighborhoods. She leads the Fly Bar's Green Drinks group, whose typical crowd includes builders, developers and others in green construction.

"We all like to drink, and we all need to constantly make new contacts for our projects," she said.

While the Green Drinks concept is just gaining traction in Tampa, it is well-established worldwide. Green Drinks Inter-

national started in London in 1989 and now boasts more than 250 chapters worldwide.

"It's a good way to keep up with what's going on," said Colleen Mackin, director of the Florida Gulf Coast chapter of the U.S. Green Building Council.

Indeed, Green Drink-goers have found jobs, inked deals and developed ideas. At the very least, they've raised glasses with friends to toast everything green.