COLUMBUS BUSINESS FIRST

Eco-friendly building materials firm set to break ground at landfill

Business First of Columbus - by Susan Deutschle for Business First

SWACO Executive Director Mike Long said he sees RASTRA's commitment to Central Ohio as additional proof that Greater Columbus can become a hub for green development.

"We believe that RASTRA can become a model for others. As other green communities see the success that RASTRA has locally, they will follow," Long said.

Indeed, Kurtz Bros. Inc., a Cleveland-based landscape supply company and recycler with six offices in Columbus, has plans to build an anaerobic digester on SWACO property later this year. The device will convert organic materials into methane gas that will be used to generate electricity. Also, Westerville-based Grossman Group Inc. has already expanded its paper recycling operation on some acreage in the same flood plain where RASTRA plans to build its facility.

The bowl-shaped, 3-acre site near SWACO's landfill, which used to serve as a retention area for waste water, is scheduled to be graded by August 15th by Westerville-based Shelly Materials Inc. In exchange for 350,000 cubic yards of fill needed to do the job, Shelly, an asphalt manufacturer, will be permitted to mine the limestone on an unused portion of the trash plant property.

"Once the big hole is gone, construction on the RASTRA facility will start," Berlekamp said.

RASTRA's new plant will be built with its own building panels without using cranes and other heavy equipment that are typically needed to erect traditional concrete structures. It's a new way of doing things that Holik hopes will eventually catch on with commercial and residential builders, including do-it-yourselfers.

Environmentally friendly building products have long been popular in Europe, but RASTRA has toyed with the concept for the past three decades to bring an affordable, durable insulated concrete form to the U.S. mass market that would make environmentalists swoon.

"We discovered in the early 1970s that when you coat ground-up post-consumable EPS with cement and shape it like a big box of Rice Krispies, it becomes a non-combustible building form that holds plaster and stucco very well and is so light it doesn't require heavy equipment to move," Holik said.

Not so light, however, that a big bad wolf could huff and puff and blow the house down. Holik says the panels can withstand winds up to 200 miles per hour, in addition to being a four-hour fire-rated material that resists mold and insects.

"This is the kind of breakthrough project that puts waste to work for us and brings new benefits," Long said.

Susan Deutschle is a freelance writer in Columbus.