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People, Profits, and Place - Friday conference to promote 'green' business practices

By [Eric Eyre](#)

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Morgantown-based SustainU Clothing isn't your typical college apparel manufacturer.

The company makes clothes from recycled cotton, plastic bottles and post-industrial textile waste. SustainU subcontractors spin yarn, knit fabrics and stitch apparel in the United States. The eco-friendly approach seems to be paying off. The company recently started retail operations at West Virginia University and 15 other colleges. SustainU also has supplied apparel for dozens of programs and events.

"Sustainability is about having a set of values," said Trey Dunham, SustainU's marketing director. "It's about doing the right thing, caring about people, trying to make a difference in the world." Dunham will talk about SustainU's values and growth Friday at the West Virginia Sustainability Summit in Morgantown.

Event organizers hope to promote sustainable business practices as a way to create jobs. Entrepreneurs, public officials and nonprofit organization leaders are scheduled to attend.

"Green products and services are in demand around the world," said Sara Dearing of the Discover the Real West Virginia Foundation, which is co-hosting the event. "There's an enormous opportunity for the state's businesses and entrepreneurs to meet this growing demand."

Companies that "go green" by reducing waste and increasing energy efficiency ultimately save money and increase profits, said Pam Curry, executive director of the Charleston-based Center for Economic Options, the event's other co-host.

"But it isn't just about profitability," she said. "Becoming more sustainable is also good for our environment and our people. We often talk about a 'triple bottom line,' which is easily summed up by the 'three P's' -- people, profits and planet."

West Virginia companies already making a commitment to sustainability include the Toyota plant in Putnam County and Huntington-based Steel of West Virginia.

Curry said West Virginia businesses won't become completely green overnight - especially in a state dominated by extraction industries. But companies can become "different shades of green - from pastel green to forest green," she said.

"We don't yet have a good handle on sustainable business and job growth in West Virginia, but that is starting to change," Curry said. "We know there is interest out there from our research nationally, and from talking with clients and colleagues."

The Center for Economic Options recently launched a "Green Business, Green Jobs Accelerator" project to help entrepreneurs start and expand sustainable businesses. Curry plans to talk about the project at Friday's event.

"We have been concerned for years that West Virginia's businesses weren't positioning themselves to take advantage of emerging 'green' markets and job opportunities," she said. "At the close of the summit, we hope that more people understand the importance of sustainability, and the benefits it can bring, and how they can be involved."

The summit starts 9 a.m. Friday at the Waterfront Place Hotel in Morgantown. Keynote speakers are Sen. Jay Rockefeller, Dow Chemical Co. executive Neil Hawkins, and organic farmer Anthony Flaccavento.

Other speakers and panelists include: Mark Berardi, benchmarking manager at Toyota; Adam Krason, an architect at ZMM Inc.; Carl Irwin, state coordinator at WVU's National Research Center of Coal and Energy; and Sandra Nessing, managing director for sustainability for American Electric Power.

The event costs \$75 to attend. For more information, contact Dearing at sdear...@drwvfoundation.org or 304-345-0700. The conference agenda is available at www.drwvfoundation.org. Event sponsors are JP Morgan Chase Foundation, AT&T, Verizon, Chesapeake Energy, WVU and the Robert C. Byrd Institute for Advanced Flexible Manufacturing.