

DAPWOOD FURNITURE

NMGCC's BUSINESS RECYCLER OF THE YEAR

JAMES GLOVER



When a company is bestowed with the New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce's Recycling Business of the Year Award, it must be doing something right. In the case of Dapwood Furniture, an Albuquerque-based company that crafts durable handmade furniture the recognition is the result of a culture of sustainability instituted into the workplace by company president Gregg Mich.

Mich's concerns for the health of the planet inspired his "business as un-usual" approach, which seeks to minimize any potential negative impacts on the environment and the community while maximizing positive impacts. Mich monitors the company's daily operations to find ways to improve its sustainability footprint, such as being attentive to the sources of wood, types of finish, fabrics and re-use, as well as energy usage and conservation. Mich "up-cycles" what others might consider trash. His goal is to produce zero waste and turn a business cost into a value-added product.



Hand-crafted Dapwood furniture

Dapwood completed a project with a local national laboratory to discover options for utilizing the sawdust and shavings the lab generates. The company is also working with New Mexico State University to evaluate market potential for new products. One of the most exciting things they have researched is the production of biochar, which stores carbon in a stable form that is beneficial for soil and plant health. Biochar could play a major role internationally in reducing the amount of carbon in the atmosphere.

Dapwood's interaction with community is another guiding principle. Mich always tries to work with local or regional suppliers so that there can be a greater, positive effect on the local scale instead of being lost in national or worldwide numbers. "Working locally also creates lasting friendships that make life more enjoyable," Mich says. Donating time, money and products to local charities is another way that allows Dapwood to contribute directly to the community and see some of the benefits firsthand.

Mich is frustrated by the overuse of the term "green" and its tendency to be misunderstood by the public. One example, he says, is when someone takes a simplistic view on purported benefits of a green product such as bamboo and doesn't look at the entire picture. It is well known that bamboo grows quickly and is touted as a wonder product. However, Mich says that it takes an enormous amount of energy to convert bamboo into a marketable product. Furthermore, along the way, industrial components may be introduced, the energy waste of shipping across the planet is ignored, as are substandard work conditions overseas. And, he points out, an environment loses biodiversity when stands of bamboo are planted instead of a diversified ecosystem. Mich believes that these sorts of complicated issues need to be taken into account before slapping a green sticker on something and calling it good.



Applying natural linseed oil on a Dapwood frame

In conjunction with the 2012 Business Recycler of the Year award, the New Mexico Green Chamber erected a billboard in Albuquerque to share Dapwood's philosophy and accomplishments with the community. Gregg Mich's creation of a sustainable business culture could well inspire businesses of any size. ☒