



## **St. Augustine businesses are making the switch to environmentally friendly practices**

By Colleen Jones  
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Paper or hay straws are the latest in a stream of environmentally friendly products businesses are rolling into their operations these days.

Considering 500 million plastic straws are used and discarded every day in the U.S, making the switch to biodegradable alternatives will help restaurants cut down on their carbon footprint. Recently, reports of aquatic animals getting entangled in plastic — sometimes fatally — has also drawn public concern.

So not surprisingly, more businesses and other establishments are choosing to go green in the products they use and the practices they employ, from ditching foam take-out boxes to replacing plastic bags with paper ones or cloth re-usable options.

For Brendan Black, general manager of Mojo's Tacos, it's about personal responsibility.

"We feel it's our obligation to do our part to help out," Black said. "In the past two years, we've gone completely green. We've taken basically every step we could."

It's also something customers can get behind and perhaps even play a part in their choosing to patronize one outlet or another. Black said the reaction they've received from diners has been one of total support.

Black said Mojo's now has biodegradable cups with a built-in sipper, paper to-go containers, and virtually every other supply they use is recycled.

The City Bistro Tea House & Coffee Co. has also gotten behind the trend, too.

"We have a strict recycling policy and a zero-waste approach to food items, paper and glass," owners Shawn Mason and Tash Olivera said in an email to The Record. "Our carry-out items are packaged in recyclable, environmentally friendly containers and, when dining in, guests have the use of ceramic mugs, flatware and silverware."

The Bistro also tries to use locally sourced foods whenever possible and in-house jams, hummus and pesto which cuts back on shipping and minimizes packaging waste. Its coffee is direct trade and organic and its tea loose-leaf rather than bagged.

Making the switch isn't cheap, however. Black said the cost of green products are three or more times as expensive as conventional options.

For the Kookaburra, environmental consciousness is a part of the coffee shop's culture, including biodegradable straws, discounts for customers who bring in their own cups, boxed water over water bottles, and using coffee grounds for gardening and composting.

One company not in the service industry that's also taken sustainability to heart is Island Prep, which runs preschool and elementary education programs in St. Augustine.

Seven years ago, Island Prep opened up as an "eco-friendly" business.

"That was really our big push," said elementary principal Kate Batzel. "Our owner is a mom herself, and she wanted an environment that was clean and green."

That means using 100 percent biodegradable or recyclable products, cleaning products without harsh chemicals, a water-filling station where students can fill their own reusable bottles, and a curriculum that emphasizes environmental stewardship. The school also has gardens and composts which the children help care for.

Publix as a corporation began thinking environmentally as early as the 1970s when it began collecting cardboard packaging from all its stores and recycling it. In 2001, the company introduced its Get Into a Green Routine program to incorporate energy and water conservation into its operations. Stores ask customers if they prefer paper over plastic bags and every location accept plastic bags from the public to pass along to recycling facilities.

The St. Augustine Amphitheatre has also been ahead of the curve in their sustainability initiatives. The venue launched its Green Hands program in 2014. With the installation of seven water-filling stations in 2016, the venue has eliminated over 80,000 single-use plastic bottles. It's also rolled out service cups that, if brought back, can be refilled for a discount, LED lighting, on-site recycling, and a garden/compost program.

Jennifer Snare, Green Hands coordinator, said that with a 4,000-capacity venue, the benefits of those measures quickly add up.

"I think it's been great for us," said Snare. "It's less cleanup, less beer spilled on the floor, less single-use cups. I think people are expecting us to. I think it's part of our obligation to the earth."