



Green Light District

Eco-friendly limousines? An earth-loving dental spa? Meet six Chicago businesses you'd never think of as green | *By Marissa Conrad* |

Strictly speaking, the greenest way to throw a party "would be to have no party at all," says Shannon Downey, founder of Pivotal Production, the eco-friendly Chicago event firm behind such such epic bashes as this year's Woman Made Gala. "But where's the fun in that?" Instead, Downey, who in college wanted to be a park ranger, is on a one-woman crusade to change everything she can about her typically wasteful industry—say, the time she made a wall out of 1,000 naval oranges, then delivered them to the American Indian Center food pantry—without compromising the look, feel and fun of her swankiest affairs.

These days in Chicago, everyone from salon owners to limo company VPs—luxury-based business leaders you would never expect to launch headfirst into the pro-environment movement—are taking the same stand as Downey: Go green, stay glam. And it's working like a charm (made of metaphorical recycled metals, of course).

On a sunny Wednesday, Janice Blankenstein, Midwestern vice president of chauffeur service Diva Limousine (the A-list service for the Academy Awards), pulls up to lunch in a sexy black Escalade

hybrid. Nearly all of Diva's Chicago-based cars (Escalades, Suburbans, 120-inch stretch limos and more), including this one, run on diesel or ethanol-based E85, which emit fewer greenhouse gases than traditional gasoline. By using more efficient vehicles ("Moving forward, all cars will be hybrids," says Blankenstein), plus strategies like reducing idling time, the company plans to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 20 percent in the next 10 years. What won't be cut: perks like having a customer's favorite cocktail waiting in the car.

To open Zoetica, a new wellness center in the Gold Coast, Lilly Ostojich spent nearly four years finding stylish green fixtures, even calling a lumberyard in California to track down PureBond, a formaldehyde-free plywood, for her custom-made furniture. "I don't know who decided that whatever is green should be ugly," she says. "This is totally the opposite." Zoetica—where everything, down to a sleek resin ceiling with real leaves inside, is eco-friendly—is awaiting LEED platinum certification, the highest level on the scale.

Meanwhile, in Lakeview, L'Etoile Salon is the only one in Chicago using British line Organic

Color Systems, an ammonia-free hair dye. Farther north, 53-year-old Davis Imperial Cleaners is still learning new tricks, becoming the first in Illinois to receive one of the highest levels of certification from the Green Cleaners Council.

Steven Koos, co-founder of new Ora Dental Studio, pauses as he walks down the mint-and-tan hallways of his South Loop practice—which, too glamorous for a dentist's office, boasts features like Energy Star HDTVs in every treatment room. But Koos is more eager to show off the Demolizer II, a machine that uses dry heat to dispose of medical waste, eliminating the hazardous fumes of incineration. The Northwestern grad has incorporated countless other green aspects into Ora, including digital, lead-free X-rays.

Back at Pivotal, Downey just signed a lease at Avondale building Green Exchange, the first green business center in the country, slated to open this year. Koos will open a Wicker Park studio by early 2010, while L'Etoile is expanding into the space next door, not to mention redecorating with eco-friendly paints. For Chicago, at least, it seems like there are greener days ahead. ■

GREEN THUMBS Clockwise from top left: Ora Dental Studio's South Loop location; event planner Shannon Downey; the Mercedes-Benz R320 BlueTEC alternative-fuel vehicle used by Diva Limousine; a treatment room at L'Etoile Salon; the Woman Made Gala; Davis Imperial Cleaners; a treatment room at Ora.