

Profile of Success

Putting Green

How can you save the planet? Purchasing recycled products? Donating to Greenpeace? Driving hybrid vehicles? How about playing mini-golf?

In 1997, the imaginative mind of an eight year-old boy inspired his mother, Laurel Gamm, to develop an environmentally themed adventure park. The New Ulm, MN park Putting Green would combine fun family activities with messages about caring for our environment. Gamm explains "The blend of lighthearted family fun with the serious need to care for our environment seemed a perfect combination for success."

As Gamm started planning the park, her mind kept returning to a class she had taken on sustainable business. Gamm found herself asking "How are we going to save the planet?" To Gamm, the answer was by having businesses and people working together. With that, Gamm decided the theme of the park should be sustainability.

Putting Green's mission is to engage people in fun and meaningful experiences that will increase awareness of important environmental issues, encourage informed decision-making, and inspire the adoption of sustainable practices.

Putting Green achieves its mission with the help of its young eco-preneurs. Twelve area high school students are taking a Twenty-First Century Business and Entrepreneurship course which teaches *triple bottom line* practices. Triple bottom line measures the performance of businesses based on three broad sets of criteria: financial performance, social contributions, and environmental impact. One of Putting Green's main goals is to inspire and train our young people to be the leaders of tomorrow by giving them the opportunity to discover, create and innovate, and be the next, better stewards of our natural resources.

Putting Green provides a place where families and students can come to learn about the environment,

develop eco-friendly designs, and run a business. The community embraced the idea and became an integral part of the planning process.

"Putting Green was a community project in the truest sense," states Nonprofits Assistance Fund's Executive Director Kate Barr. "The extent of planning, involvement and fundraising really showed how much support they had."



As the planning developed on the park, Gamm soon realized she would need additional financial help to foster the park's growth. Nonprofits Assistance Fund was able to help Putting Green with a loan to complete Phase One of the nine-hole course. This loan provided funds needed for capital expenditures. "We were glad to be

able to provide the immediate cash that was needed to finish the first phase and get the project done," says Barr

Nonprofits Assistance Fund staff also assisted Putting Green with technical assistance such as separating out capital expenses and administrative expenses, reworking cash flows, explaining filing requirements, and hiring qualified administrative staff.

Today Putting Green operates May through October thanks to the help of the community and over 250 students. The park features a solar-powered clubhouse, native plant gardens and walkways, bike rentals, interpretive river trail, and educational exhibits. Student groups regularly visit Putting Green for fun and for education. Student course designs even inspired the Science Museum of Minnesota's "Big Backyard" mini-golf park.

With Laurel Gamm's vision and support from Nonprofits Assistance Fund, the planet gets a little bit healthier with every birdie, bogey and hole-in-one at Putting Green.