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## GREEN BUSINESS

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SUSTAINABILITY EXECUTIVES  
GREEN MANUFACTURING

2010 **BEST OF THE NORTH BAY** BALLOT (PG. 25)

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About the cover: The living roof atop the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco (Photo by Tom Fox, SWA Group)



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# GREEN PINSTRIPES

Bringing sustainability to the executive suite

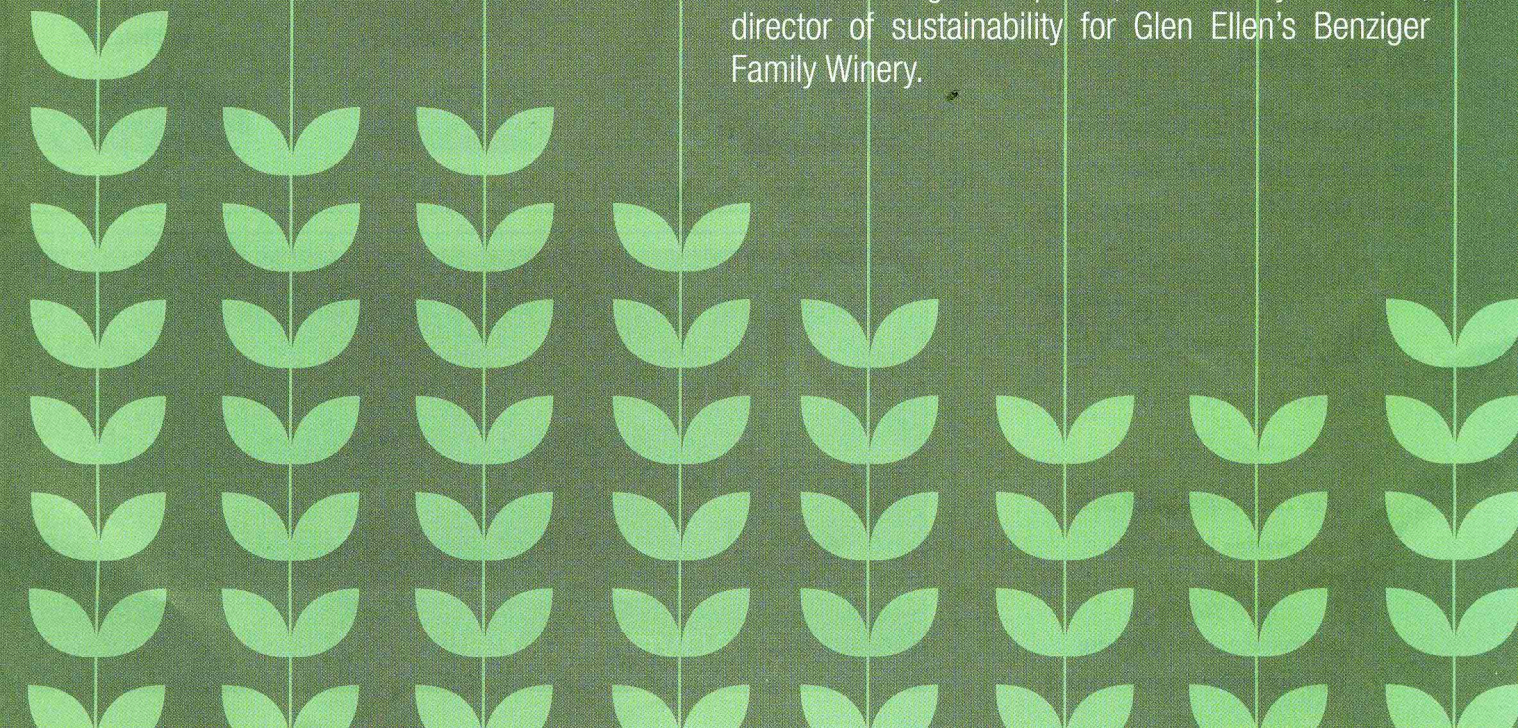
By Patricia Dines

There's a new brand of executive in town, and their favorite color is green. Bearing titles like chief sustainability officer (CSO) and director of sustainability, their vision stems from a passion for environmental and social responsibility. They work to help companies not only save money with increased energy and water efficiency, but also identify new products and income streams, enhance brands, deepen customer loyalty, expand employee satisfaction, position their businesses

competitively, manage resources responsibly, reduce liabilities—and save the planet.

Experts emphasize that, while green execs alone can't change an organization, their authority can be vital in bringing environmental principles onboard. So, what are they doing exactly, and how can their experiences help companies of all sizes develop their own eco-possibilities?

To learn more, we talked with three local pioneers: Lynelle Cameron, director of sustainability for San Rafael's Autodesk; Geof Syphers, CSO for Rohnert Park's Coddling Enterprises; and Colby Eierman, director of sustainability for Glen Ellen's Benziger Family Winery.



### Greening global design software

Autodesk's director of sustainability, Lynelle Cameron, started her career not in the corporate world but in environmental nonprofits, where she used her degrees in environmental policy and sociology "to drive change on important environmental issues."

Cameron says that when she read Paul Hawken's 1993 book, *Ecology of Commerce*, "It woke me up. I realized the greatest way to make dramatic transformational change was to work with the corporate sector, to change how we're thinking about business," given the interconnectedness (or interdependence) between business and the natural world.

Within months, she'd applied to business school, and with the MBA she received from UC Berkeley, joined Palo Alto's Hewlett-Packard (HP). There she sought "to drive transformational change in the IT hardware sector," in areas such as product design, energy efficiency, and e-waste. "If we could get HP to make a shift," she figured, "we could influence the whole industry."

The job she created at HP focused on "product stewardship," which evolved into a corporate social and environmental responsibility program. "That was in the early days of sustainability work," she remembers, as the field expanded beyond regulatory compliance and cleanup to consider products' embedded lifecycle costs. "So that was quite exciting and pioneering back then."

However, an even more compelling strategy soon occurred to her: embedding environmental impact analysis into Autodesk's design software. She saw that making it "easier for architects, engineers

and designers to make better decisions" could "radically change how we design our built environment—from buildings to airplanes to highways to electricity grids to consumer products."

Autodesk, which Cameron says creates design software "for quite literally everything that's built on the planet," was founded in 1982 with its groundbreaking AutoCAD software. It's now a public company with almost 7,000 employees, more than 9 million users worldwide and nearly \$2 billion in annual revenues.

When she approached the company, she found it already sponsoring the PBS

documentary series "e2: the economies of being environmentally conscious," and starting to ponder what sustainable design might mean for its business.

So they co-created her current position and, three years later, she's managing a team of five employees, coordinating with every department in the company and reporting to the chief marketing officer because marketing already connects across the organization.

Cameron sees her three areas of responsibility as making Autodesk's products the best for sustainable design; implementing best practices for



Bonnie Freeman

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Lynelle Cameron is director of sustainability at San Rafael's Autodesk.

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sustainability in the company's operations to demonstrate what's possible; and providing software grants to promising clean tech startups to help them get to market faster.

Autodesk's tools have already helped design a wide range of eco-projects, including wave energy devices, zero-energy homes, a more fuel-efficient aircraft engine, a hybrid gas-electric sports car, the



Geoff Syphers, chief sustainability officer at Coddling Enterprises

first wind turbine approved for home use, smart transit information, ecosystem restorations and San Francisco's LEED platinum-certified California Academy of Sciences. The company showcases customer projects at its (LEED platinum) Autodesk Gallery in San Francisco. (For more about LEED, visit [www.usgbc.org](http://www.usgbc.org) or [www.nrdc.org/buildinggreen/leed.asp](http://www.nrdc.org/buildinggreen/leed.asp).)

Autodesk, on a path to reduce its own greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 85 percent by 2050 (relative to its value add to society as measured by Autodesk's contribution to GDP), is already making internal changes, such as encouraging customer software downloads to avoid the greater eco-impacts of packaged products. The company also recently announced a new open-source methodology to "help global companies set ambitious GHG reduction targets."

To Cameron, Autodesk tangibly benefits from its sustainability efforts in three ways: positive brand reputation, as "a leader in sustainable design, which gives us new access to customers;" top line revenue, from product sales; and cost savings through increased operational efficiency.

Cameron feels that people wanting to do this type of job need three key assets: a business degree or business experience ("to

understand how a business operates"); comfort working in "horizontal, cross-functional" teams; and "excellent persuasive communication skills." Specialized ecological knowledge is needed for some roles, she adds, referring to a team member with climate science expertise who was "extremely valuable" in developing Autodesk's GHG target methodology.

Michael Cabot, Autodesk's director of corporate and industry public relations, comments that sustainability "really is a passion here. Everybody, from the CEO on down, is really committed. It's not just lip service or corporate trends."

### Designing sustainable communities

Geoff Syphers also proposed his current position as CSO to his employer, Coddling Enterprises. Four years ago, while doing green consulting there, Syphers was intrigued by the work and saw that instead of flying all over the world and working on hundreds of projects, he could focus on one company and bicycle to work, thus reducing his own eco-footprint. It turned out the company would also save money while gaining a much-needed central person to organize its various sustainability efforts.

As CSO, Syphers works with employees across the organization and reports to Coddling's President/CEO Brad Baker. For more than 50 years, Coddling's specialty has been building and managing local residential and commercial real estate, including creating Montgomery Village and Coddlingtown. It now owns and manages 25 commercial sites and, according to the *NorthBay biz* 2009 listing of the Top 500 companies in the North Bay, earns in excess of \$26 million in annual revenues and employs about 73 people.

When Baker took Coddling's reins in 2004, he decided to put the company on a sustainable path. Syphers thinks this was both because Baker's generation was raised with environmental values that Baker wanted reflected in his work, and because the company sees the future of development not as enclosed shopping malls but as mixed-use projects that combine shopping, housing, schools and transit.

As part of its sustainable direction, Coddling is investing in eco-technologies such as biodiesel, steel framing and energy-efficient air filtration.

However, its primary focus is creating "a deeply sustainable mixed-use community" called Sonoma Mountain Village (SMV). This \$1 billion redevelopment of Agilent's 200-acre Rohnert Park campus is expected to feature approximately 1,900 homes, more

## Guiding Through Climate Change Laws

For over forty years, Dickenson, Peatman & Fogarty has been on the forefront of providing clients with a clear analysis of the impacts of new state laws. DP&F is now advising clients on California's Global Warming Solutions Act, which mandates a reduction of approximately 25% in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020. The State is currently developing laws and directives to help achieve this goal. DP&F is working with local agencies to address greenhouse gas emission reductions, and apprising clients how to deal with these issues in both existing and new development projects.

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than 4,000 jobs and residents, 27 acres of parks and open space and 825,000 square feet of commercial space (including an existing 700,000 square feet that's being repurposed). This will make it Sonoma County's largest development.

Yet, SMV's project plan also has some breathtaking eco-aspirations. It aims to use 80 percent less water than a typical development, thus needing no additional water above the site's historical uses.

Transportation emissions are expected to be cut by 82 percent via neighborhood electric vehicles, ride sharing, bike paths and connections to public transit. It plans to reduce waste by 98 percent through largely avoiding construction waste plus offering easy drop-off points and incentives for recycling, reuse and composting. The site's total annual direct CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is projected to be just 2.2 tons per person, which is 86 percent less than California's 15.2 ton average.

Because of these ambitious targets, this project is the first in North America to be endorsed by One Planet Communities, an international program seeking to demonstrate "that it's possible to solve our planet's biggest environmental problems while operating in a competitive business market and living a quality lifestyle."

Codding has also signed Sonoma County's first community benefits agreement with local community groups, officially committing to standards for green building, labor, affordable housing, transit, water use, energy use, open space and more.

The company hopes SMV will be a place where it's easy for people to walk or bike to work, school, shopping, daily farmers markets, parks and community gardens, and otherwise choose healthier, happier lifestyles. Already the site has 30 businesses with 600 jobs and a 1.14 megawatt solar array capable of powering 1,000 homes. Resident move-in is expected to start this year or next.

Syphers brings to his work a variety of skills, including extensive business experience plus training in physics, solar energy engineering and conflict resolution. He finds the latter especially helpful in translating between different styles and generating consensus. He has no business degree and doesn't feel one is particularly necessary.

He explains, "I don't know that anything is actually specifically required for this position. I think the people who are first in are helping define it. Sustainability really encompasses basically everything, so it would be impossible for someone to be an expert in every aspect." His advice is

that people interested in this work learn a little bit about most eco-topics and then develop an area of deep expertise.

When asked why he cares about sustainability, Syphers replies, "I believe in trying to do the right thing. Working on the environment isn't separate from any other aspect of my life." He compares sustainability to finding a delicious ripe peach and sharing it with a young child, who replies, "I've never tasted anything like this before." He continues, "Ultimately, it's not about the carbon and water savings. It's about our experiences in community with each other. And protecting the environment is one aspect of that."

### Collaborating with the land

Colby Eierman took a different path to his position as director of sustainability and gardens for Benziger Family Winery. After managing the onsite gardens and animals for a year, he added his sustainability responsibilities a year ago, when the previous director of sustainability left. His primary task is managing a cross-departmental, 10-member "green team" that includes co-owner Mike Benziger.

The company's commitment to sustainability began in the early 1990s, when Mike Benziger realized the vineyard's

chemical growing practices were diminishing the land's vitality and thus the wine's unique characteristics. He shifted toward less-toxic practices and, in 2000, his estate property became the first certified biodynamic winery in Sonoma County. By 2007, all of Benziger's purchased grapes were also either certified organic, biodynamic or sustainable.

"When we began working in tune with



Colby Eierman is director of sustainability and gardens for Benziger Family Winery.

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*“We’re blessed to be stewards of this place for this brief moment in time, and we take that responsibility very seriously.”*

—Mike Benziger, Benziger Family Winery

nature’s rhythms, instead of against them,” Benziger reports, “a whole new world opened up for us.”

The company’s eco-results are already notable. It’s changed to lighter wine bottles (reducing net weight by 287,000 pounds so far); printed its wine labels on 30 percent post-consumer recycled paper; installed hand dryers (which saved “several dumpsters of paper”); brought in water filters (to eliminate weekly deliveries); changed to washable plates for employee meals (saving \$4,000 and 20,000 disposable plates annually); and placed solar lighting in the parking lot (with more solar to come).

Guests touring the winery travel in biodiesel and electric vehicles, and employees in the carpool incentive program have already racked up 1,350 passenger trips, thus avoiding 38,000 tons of carbon and earning points towards gift certificates (expected to total \$10,000 in 2009). Employee classes on home greening are planned for this year.

Additionally, Benziger’s water conservation practices and new equipment are expected to trim water use by 20 percent. For instance, instead of washing barrels by filling them with water, a steam rinse system lowers water use from 22 gallons to half a gallon per barrel, saving more than 100,000 gallons per year. The company has also recycled millions of gallons in wastewater over the past 10 years through its wetlands system.

A key priority for Eierman now is monitoring and setting targets for water, fuel and recycling. The team is also developing a “snapshot” of Benziger’s carbon footprint.

Eierman’s passion for sustainable gardening began as a teenager, when his best friend’s mother, a *Sunset* magazine writer, set them up growing vegetables. From there, he studied landscape architecture at the University of Oregon, did a six-month farming apprenticeship at UC Santa Cruz, started a nonprofit to create school gardens, was director of gardens for Napa’s COPIA and grew vegetables for Berkeley’s Chez Panisse and Marin’s raw food restaurant Roxanne’s. He’s always used organic practices, never seeing a need for synthetic pesticides.

From the start, he recalls, “I enjoyed being able to harvest what I eat, connect with people and be outside. It just always resonated with me.” His sustainability position at Benziger has brought him inside now, to work with “spreadsheets and subcommittees,” but “it’s all rewarding, and I actually like the balance of using all sides of my brain. It keeps me engaged and interested.”

He also works with people across the company, tracking needs and projects in different departments, and exploring how to integrate green into their activities. He says, “The fact Mike is really committed to this makes it all flow pretty well.”

Why does sustainability matter to Eierman? “It’s just my sensibility that we should consider our impact on the environment and the legacy we’re going to leave. I grew up on the other side of



Main: Benziger Family Winery conducts tours on an electric tram; inset: Solar lighting in the winery’s parking lots adds to its eco-friendliness. (Photos courtesy of Benziger Family Winery)

this hill and hiked all over this mountain as a kid. I just love this landscape. So it’s great to be part of a company that’s committed to not diminishing the quality of the environment here.”

### The future

So what’s the future of green executives? Syphers sees two trends expanding their ranks. First is an increasing number of green MBA graduates and others trained in prioritizing the triple bottom line of financial, social and environmental results. Second is the pressure on businesses from “physical limits that are harder and harder to ignore,” including both direct limits in supply and shared limits such as climate and water. “So there’s an increasing interest in taking care of the planet’s assets.”

Eierman also observes an enhanced environmental consciousness in upcoming generations, and hopes that companies will increasingly commit resources to these issues, “because they’re important and hopefully we can make a difference.”

Even more long-term is Cameron’s vision for green execs. “Ideally,” she anticipates, “all sustainability officers will be out of a job. I mean, as a society, we’ve gotten ourselves into quite a mess, so this position is highly needed now to get us back on track. But the vision for me has always been that we influence companies to such an extent that sustainability becomes part of how a company does business, and it doesn’t need a specific sustainability director leading the effort. It’s like ‘quality’ was 10 or 20 years ago, where they used to have quality experts, and now it’s just a basic expectation that quality is important. I expect the same will become true with sustainability.” ■