

Plan targets area around Pearson airport as unique eco-business zone

BY TERENCE BELFORD

Eric Lange is proving that green business is good business. And not just for his company, Lange Transportation & Storage Inc., either. His 70,000-square-foot facility has become a showplace and practical teaching aid for the 12,500 businesses that make their home near Toronto's Pearson International Airport.

Lange Transportation is at the heart of an innovative approach to corporate social responsibility and protection of the environment, called Partners in Project Green.

In simplest terms, the Greater Toronto Airports Authority has partnered with the Toronto Region Conservation Authority, 20 local companies and five separate governments to turn 12,000 hectares surrounding Pearson into a new green economic zone.

The goal is to turn the entire area into a showplace for environmentally sensitive business operations – albeit operations seeking a hard-edged, bottom-line benefit.

"We want to re-brand the entire area around Pearson as North America's largest eco-business zone," says Chris Rickett, project manager for Partners in Project Green. "It is already becoming an incubator for green technology and eco-friendly operations."

"Lange Transportation is just one terrific example."

Terrific indeed, agrees Mr. Lange. For him, going green has meant slashing a \$60,000-a-year natural-gas bill to zero by tapping into geothermal heat under his driveway. He has also used a combination of solar power, energy efficient lighting and new double-pane windows to slash the Mississauga company's monthly electricity bill to just \$1,859 last month, from \$3,500 a

month in August, 2007.

"I spent about \$600,000 and originally figured payback would take 8½ years," he says. "But then natural gas prices kept going up, and now I figure the whole thing will have paid for itself in just six years."

"I not only get out from under rising energy costs, but I get an air-conditioned warehouse and the ability to keep my rates low – both of which are terrific competitive advantages."

He has led groups from a dozen local businesses through his warehouse and office, each of them looking to see whether lessons he has learned can apply to their operations.

Providing those dollars-and-cents savings through embracing conservation is at the heart of Partners in Project Green, explains Toby Lennox, vice-president corporate affairs and communications at the GTAA.

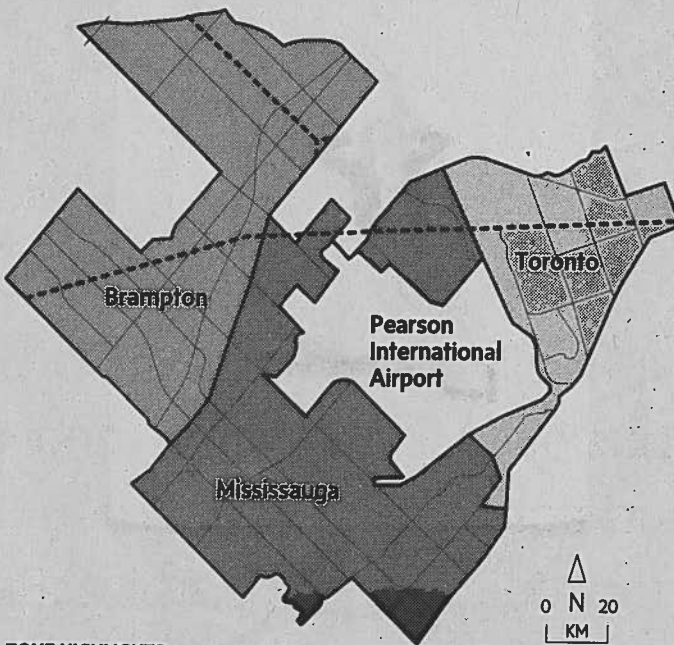
He says the GTAA immediately saw the potential to brand Pearson as distinctly different from all other North American aviation hubs with huge potential economic benefits when the Toronto Region Conservation Area first approached the authority with the idea last January.

"It was a no-brainer," Mr. Lennox says. "We were already in the process of spending tens of millions of dollars preserving the two major watersheds that run through our 1,806 hectares, and millions more making Pearson more energy-efficient and effective."

The GTAA could see the attraction for air carriers, companies wanting to relocate near Pearson, and the international prestige a green airport business zone could bring. The GTAA kicked in \$2-million in seed money; Mr. Rickett, a project manager with the Conservation Area, was named project manager, and Partners

Project Green at a glance

The Pearson eco-business zone aims to be the biggest environmentally friendly business park in North America.



ZONE HIGHLIGHTS

- » More than 12,000 hectares of industrial and commercial land.
- » Canada's largest employment area; home to 12,500 businesses and more than 355,000 employees.
- » Sectors include automotive supply chain, logistics and warehousing, food processing, plastics and aviation.
- » Each year, the zone area consumes approximately 5.8 million MWh of electricity, 46 million gigajoules of natural gas, and 109 million cubic metres of water, resulting in 1.7 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions.

DOUGLAS COULL/THE GLOBE AND MAIL » SOURCE: GTAA PARTNERS IN PROJECT GREEN

in Project Green was launched.

The group has a 20-member steering committee plus representation from the cities of Toronto, Mississauga and Brampton; Region of Peel; province of Ontario and the Conservation Authority. While the federal government has yet to join the group, Mr. Rickett says they are saving a seat at the table.

The project also has a quartet of innovative programs under way. One offers teams of

energy- and conservation-efficiency experts to audit a company's operation and recommend changes. A second is looking at what must be done to retrofit 1 million square feet of existing industrial space in the green zone; while a third is focusing on water preservation and use and the preservation or even expansion of natural ground cover such as treed areas.

The fourth program, in partnership with the Clinton Foun-

dation, is investigating the creation of a "green products co-operative" where companies could buy green products in bulk.

Project Green has drawn the support of one of the largest operations in the zone – the Molson's Canada brewery and head office.

"For us it was a natural fit," says Ferg Devins, Molson's vice-president of government and public affairs. "When we merged with Coors in 2005, we set targets company-wide to reduce our resources use by 5 per cent a year. Between 2002 and 2007, for example, we have cut natural gas use by 34 per cent, electricity by 23 per cent, and water by 38 per cent."

Molson is looking for ways to use the 40,000 tonnes of grain waste its brewing operation produces each year to generate electricity from methane gas created by biomass conversion. Forecasts suggest Molson's biomass waste could generate 3.5 megawatts of power.

"What we really need is to find a local partner in the zone, like a food products company, so we could mix the grain with their waste to create a really efficient fuel," Mr. Devins says.

Mr. Rickett says the effect of an eco-business zone could be profound. On a yearly basis, the zone consumes 5.8 million megawatt hours of electricity, 46 million gigajoules of natural gas and 109 million cubic metres of water. Energy consumption alone in the area creates 1.7 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.

"The great thing is that with companies like Lange, we are now able to show concrete examples of just how we can go green and the terrific benefits that brings to the bottom line," Mr. Rickett says.

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HOW LANGE DID IT

When Eric Lange bought a 30-year-old Mississauga industrial building as the new headquarters for his Lange Transportation and Storage Inc. in 2006 he knew it would need some work. Just how much work was a shock. "That August when my electricity bill came in it was \$3,500 ... I knew I had to do something about controlling energy costs," he says.

He started by putting on a new roof and replacing old windows with new double-pane thermal glass. Then he took on the lighting system, replacing old fixtures with new more efficient fluorescents.

For the 16 private offices, he put solar tubes on the roof; they collect sunlight and, via a system of mirrors, reflect it down into the offices. (A fluorescent backup system helps on cloudy days and at night.)

But he thinks his masterstroke is the use of geothermal energy to replace natural gas heating.

The total cost was \$600,000, and the system will pay for itself in six years, he says. His \$60,000 natural gas bill is now zero and his electricity costs are a much more manageable \$1,859 a month.

"The only major problem I faced was convincing my natural gas supplier I was not stealing energy from it. It could not believe I no longer needed natural gas," he says. "It took four months and two inspections to convince them to remove the gas meter." That saved another \$24 a month.

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