



Faces of West Sound: A weekly profile of people who make our community interesting

It's good business to be 'green,' McKenzie says

By Angela D. Smith, Sun Staff

Clif McKenzie's office looks out on a knoll of shaggy grass at Poulsbo's Twelve Trees industrial park. An engraved stone out front of Watson Furniture Group factory, which McKenzie heads, explains the unkempt grass isn't a mistake, it's an example of one of the company's principles. He calls it the tool theory of environmentalism.

"My parents told me that when you borrow a tool, you return it in better shape," he said. With the world ... aren't we only borrowing it for the short time we're here?" Watson Furniture, providing office furniture to customers nationwide, has been lauded for "green" business practices such as not using Styrofoam for packing, using recycled materials and replacing spray painting with powder coating.

Being responsible about the environment doesn't have to mean being on the radical end of the spectrum, he said. "The vast majority of us are in the middle and we don't realize it," he said. "We talk about environmentalism as overly complex, almost like voodoo."

The environmental aspect of the company is for the most part good business. Often, it saves money and gives increasingly environmentally aware customers what they want, he said. McKenzie and two partners 12 years ago bought the manufacturing company, founded by a Bainbridge Island family.

It just happened to be in his home county.

McKenzie was born and raised in East Bremerton, the son of a Puget Sound Naval Shipyard worker. It was partly from his father that he learned his sense of environmental responsibility. Nearly every day on his way home from work, his father would stop at the east end of the Warren Avenue bridge, pick up the litter tossed by passers-by, dump it in the trash can at home, wash his hands and sit down for an iced tea.

His father never talked directly about environmentalism, but he left a lasting impression. "He'd say, 'Well, somebody has to do,' it and I always wanted to be somebody," McKenzie said. Now McKenzie is somebody in the corner office in Poulsbo. A page photocopied from a book hangs on a whiteboard that faces his desk. It's an excerpt of a speech by Chief Seattle. It begins: "This we know; the earth does not belong to man; man belongs to the earth ..."