



WTMX/Chicago gets environmentally conscious

And Now, It's Time For Green Thoughts

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With garbage piling up everywhere, global warming wreaking havoc on weather and ecosystems around the planet and gas prices somewhere north of an arm and a leg, many people are starting to think about ditching their three-miles-per-gallon SUVs and recycling some of the garbage they generate. Unfortunately, the impact that all these environmental changes are having is a pretty big concept to wrap one's head around, and it's something that can probably paralyze the average person into inaction. Enter "Green Thoughts," a PSA series from Bonneville hot AC WTMX (101.9 the Mix)/Chicago and PD Mary Ellen Kachinske, which gives listeners simple, easy-to-execute suggestions on how to help out on a smaller scale.

"We run about 100 PSAs a week, which is probably the most in Chicago, and it's a lot for adult formats stations," Kachinske says. "In April 2007, we took a couple of banks of PSAs and made them Green Thoughts." Kachinske says one of their part-timers has a very "organic-sounding voice," and their creative services director came up with a branding sounder—much like NBC's "The More You Know" public service campaign—that accompanies each Green Thought.

"It's worked very well. We didn't want them to come off preachy either," Kachinske says, citing a recent example: "We should all turn our water off when we're brushing our teeth; a family of four could save 100 gallons of water a week by doing that." Each announcement closes with the tag line "It's a Green Thought from the Mix, a Bonneville station committed to a greener Chicago." Simple, right?

Little Effort, Big Return

The payoff is pretty big, though: Kachinske says she's seen Green Thoughts mentioned in the Mix's Arbitron diary comments, and the station has gotten a lot of positive feedback from listeners about the campaign, not to mention the fact that Mix personnel are now becoming more environmentally conscious. It even led them to redo the station's logo to include the generic recycling logo, and AC clustermate WILV

(100.3 Love FM) and classic rock WDRV (97.1 the Drive) have also started their own on-air campaigns.

After about a year of running Green Thoughts on the air, Kachinske and her staff brainstormed on how to kick things up a notch or two. Capitalizing on morning jocks Eric & Kathy's ability to score interviews and performances with big-name artists, they decided to incorporate their station events into an expanded Green Thoughts initiative.

"Our efforts are really to enlighten, educate and entertain—the big three E's—because we certainly have this great weekly cume of nearly 1 million people, and we want to get the message out about how it's easy to take small steps to making a better planet," Kachinske says. "We didn't want to come off being preachy, but if you have Alanis Morissette come and sing too, that seems to make learning fun."

The first event featured Morissette at Chicago's world-famous Shedd Aquarium, which Kachinske describes as the gateway event into the Mix Green Initiative, especially since Shedd is a partner in the effort. "Alanis came on and performed five songs," she says.

In addition to using recyclable paper drinking cups and giving out green-themed info, the station took steps to find out how much power it would use and pollution it would generate at the show so it could negate it. "We tried to think of everything so we were sending people back out in the world having hope-



Kachinske

fully erased their carbon footprint from attending our event," she says. The Mix also gave out a card directing people to its Green Thoughts Web site. The card itself is a biodegradable seed-planter embedded with wildflower seeds: just bury and water the card, and wildflowers will grow from it.

'They say you can't do everything, but everyone can do something.'

—Mary Ellen Kachinske

Everyone Can Do Something

The Mix also staged an event with Jack Johnson, where listeners brought old cell phones to be recycled; everyone who contributed qualified to get up onstage with Johnson. All attendees scored a reusable Green Mix shopping bag, and there were organic cotton T-shirts and recycled water bottles for sale.

When I spoke with her, Kachinske had just gotten back from yet another show: Mixing Maroon & Green, where the first 300 people who showed up at a downtown bar with plastic bags for recycling were allowed inside to see a free live show with Maroon 5.

"Our next one will be a recycling event at Whole Foods with John Mayer, where everyone who brings something to recycle is entered to win front-row tickets and meet-and-greet passes with John," she says. "We have 300 fluorescent light bulbs to give out. And there's a festive atmosphere."

While Kachinske is busy running a top-three market station, she still takes the time to write the Green Thoughts scripts herself even though she has several capable people around

who she could delegate to. "I enjoy it so much, and I've learned so much," she says. "I've personally given up plastic water bottles, and now we've gotten the whole staff involved. It's amazing, really. There are so many ways that you can be less wasteful in every different room in your house."

Kachinske says she's not a tree-hugger, but that was the point of the campaign: to let the average Chicagoan know that there are simple, easy ways they could contribute without making huge changes to their lives. She says, "We're certainly no trailblazers, but we have this stage, and we're able to get the information out and let them know that if they make one little change, it moves us all in the right direction."

Interestingly, when Kachinske first started doing Green Thoughts, a fair amount of tips were hard to come by, but now there's a wealth of information to pass along as going green has become mainstream. "Now you can't escape it," she says. "It's really reaching critical mass right now."

However, Kachinske realizes it's still important to keep things simple so as not to overwhelm people and make them think they need to completely overhaul their lives to become environmentally friendly. "They say you can't do everything, but everyone can do something," she says.



The Mix seed-planter: Just stick this biodegradable card in the ground, water it, and wildflowers grow.

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