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Activists still can fight, beat city hall

Grass-roots group got Green Bay to pull plug on gasification plant

By Scott Cooper Williams
Press-Gazette Media

ASHWAUBENON — A few days after Thanksgiving in 2010, John Filcher heard a knock on his door.

Standing outside in the rain was a neighbor, Greg Kujawa, who told Filcher that a company was planning a nearby industrial development that could pollute the neighborhood.

The proposed facility, akin to a trash incinerator, was known as a gasification plant.

The two neighbors soon joined in starting a group called Incinerator Free Brown County that would spend the next two years battling the industrial project.

The group ultimately defeated the gasification developers, first in Ashwaubenon and then in Green Bay. So persuaded were elected leaders in Green Bay that they did something relatively rare in the halls of government: They admitted making a mistake.

Observers surprised by the success of Incinerator Free Brown County say the group has defied public apathy and demonstrated that, even in an age of cynicism about big-money politics, there is still a place in government for good old-fashioned activism.

"They're a perfect example to everyone," Ashwaubenon Village President Mike Aubinger said. "It's a wonderful message that they sent. It does matter what you think and what you do."

The gasification development firm, Oneida Seven Generations Corp., has accused its opponents in the past of spreading misinformation about the environmental effects of its proposal. Company officials, however, declined to comment for this article.

Owned by the Oneida Tribe of Indians, the company has filed a civil lawsuit against Green Bay, alleging that the city improperly withdrew a permit for the gasification project. After a judge ruled in the city's favor Jan. 9, the development firm announced plans to appeal.

Filcher, himself an attorney, takes no small pleasure in knowing that his once-underdog activist group now can watch

» See ACTIVISTS, A6

INSIDE

Marquette heads to Sweet 16

Vander Blue scored 19 second-half points to rally third-seeded Marquette out of another hole, and the Golden Eagles survived No. 6 Butler 74-72 on Saturday to reach the Round of 16. **Sports, B1.**

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ISSN 0190-0001

019001000013

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BARTENDER LAWS DRAW PRAISE, SCORN



Rick Eiting, owner of the Re-Union Station in Neenah, is opposed to the city telling him whether bartenders should be sober while on the job. He says it's up to the business owners to enforce their own rules and regulations. SHARON CEKADA/GANNETT WISCONSIN MEDIA

GANNETT WISCONSIN MEDIA INVESTIGATIVE TEAM

SOBER SERVERS

FEW COMMUNITIES HAVE ORDINANCES ON BOOKS; ENFORCEMENT SPOTTY

By Ben Jones | Gannett Wisconsin Media Investigative Team

Tavern owner Rick Eiting doesn't want his bartenders to drink on the job. But he also doesn't want police to monitor their conduct.

"I don't think the city should be regulating me on what I do," said Eiting, owner of the ReUnion Station in Neenah. "If they do this, what's going to be my next regulation? Will it be the color of toilet paper I use in the bathroom?"

See SOBER, Page A4



Goodwill follows 'green' philosophy

Nonprofit recycles, reuses and repurposes through regional stores

By Kara Patterson
Gannett Wisconsin Media

Environmental stewardship is in the very fabric of Goodwill Industries of North Central Wisconsin's operations.

The nonprofit group — one of 166 Goodwill organizations in North America — is a community leader in recycling, reusing and repurpos-

ing. "We are green in our DNA," said Mary Haller, vice president of logistics and supply chain for Goodwill Industries of North Central Wisconsin. "We believe that lean and green fit hand in hand together. It's about ways to add value to the customer while reducing waste

» See GOODWILL, A14



A store runner moves merchandise in Appleton's new Goodwill outlet store. The store tries to sell merchandise that doesn't move at the nonprofit's retail stores. FILE/GANNETT WISCONSIN MEDIA

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Activists

From Page A1

Oneida Seven Generations fight in the courts to regain the upper hand. "Everything seemed to be going against us," he said. "Now they're the ones facing an uphill battle."

The beginning

The tug-of-war actually began before a neighbor knocked on Filcher's door that Thanksgiving weekend. Joanne Chaudoir, who lives in nearby Hobart, had learned about the industrial development weeks earlier. When she researched waste-to-energy gasification, Chaudoir was troubled to learn that it involved reducing tons of household trash to charred remains with extreme heat.

Advocates say the concept eases landfill dumping while creating a new source of electrical ener-



Members of Incinerator Free Brown County demonstrate outside the Brown County Central Library in downtown Green Bay during a December 2011 public meeting about the gasification project. FILE/STAFF-GAZETTE MEDIA

ON THE NET

www.incineratorfreebrowncty.com

gy. Chaudoir's research, however, showed that the process could create toxic emissions and cause other environmental damage.

"I thought, 'Hmm, that doesn't sound good,'" she recalled.

Chaudoir began blanketing neighborhoods in Hobart and Ashwaubenon with hundreds of fliers warning people about the project. One of the bright red fliers landed on Greg Kujawa's porch.

writing and in person, and slowly turned up the pressure on Green Bay city officials to reconsider issuing the permit.

Paper trail

Citywide elections in April 2012 also brought seven new faces to the 12-member Green Bay City Council, including some who were openly skeptical of the trash-recycling gasification development.

From the piles of public records, Filcher and his fellow activists determined that Oneida Seven Generations had misrepresented its proposal by concealing the potential environmental harm. Key evidence turned up in records showing that the plant would include 60-foot-tall smokestacks. Not only had company officials publicly stated there would be no heavy industrial smokestacks, 60 feet was nearly double Green Bay's height limitation.

"I didn't intend to have toxic ash blowing over my house," he said.

Within a couple of months, Incinerator Free Brown County had rallied Ashwaubenon residents and elected officials to oppose the development. Oneida Seven Generations, however, quickly turned its attention to another site about five miles away in Green Bay.

"The documents don't lie," Filcher said. "And they tell quite a story."

The development company adjusted its plans to comply with Green Bay law. But the damage had been done.

City officials reopened the permit process and heard four hours of testimony Oct. 3 about whether Oneida Seven Generations had secured approval for its development under false pretenses. Although the city's Plan Commission recommended leaving the permit in place, the City Council voted by a 7-5 margin to revoke the permit and kill the project.

Incinerator Free Brown County members gathered that night to celebrate what they realized was an extraordinary accomplishment. As Filcher said: "It's really hard to get the Titanic to change course."

The group has published a six-page activist manifesto called "The Incinerator Resistance Guide." It provides tips on organizing people, raising funds, promoting public awareness and deciphering rhetoric.

Amid signs that Oneida Seven Generations is trying to find another new home for its project, Incinerator Free Brown County has reached out to residents in those areas to offer encouragement and help.

"You can't be intimidated," Kujawa said. "You have to follow your convictions, and you have to believe in yourself."

The opponents protested outside regulatory hearings, testified against the project in

Meeting about once a week, the organization's core group numbered no more than a dozen people, although they got help from outside groups like the Clean Water Action Council of Northeast Wisconsin and the Mather Heights Neighborhood Association in Green Bay.

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