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Companies explore greener options

■ Variety of services cater to environmentally conscious customers

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More and more private businesses in the county are going green, selling services that promise customers that spending money now will make for greater returns in the long term.

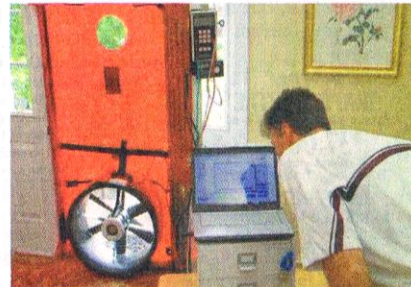
The spectrum of new businesses is wide-ranging. For instance, Springfield-based Yardsaway.com is a new free service that allows users to forward virtual coupons to their cell phones, erasing the need for paper coupons.

Earlier this month, Springfield's Ecoplanit.com launched, providing users a listing of eco-friendly products and services available in the user's state or ZIP code area.

Like many, local contractor Bob Weatherwax felt the wind change course. Last month Weatherwax launched his new company, Reston-based Ardently Green, offering \$400 to \$600 energy audits and making existing homes more energy efficient with attic insulation, new windows and comprehensive personalized analyses of what clients can do to cut the fat from their energy bills.

"I think this particular business has the wind at our back because energy costs are not going to go down," Weatherwax said. "I had a client whose kid's bathroom ceiling was 113 degrees because there was no insulation. Think how much money she'll save with us."

See Green/A3



Courtesy Photo

A technician observes a door blower test, one of the methods that companies like Reston's Ardently Green use to identify potential energy savings.

GREEN

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Businesses going green represent a relatively new market phenomenon, said Gerald Gordon, president and CEO of the Fairfax County Economic Development Authority.

"Being a green company or builder has become a brand-name thing. If you're a green contractor, for instance, you might have a leg up with federal procurements and data centers where there is so much energy in a property, the costs are offset by using renewable sources," Gordon said.

"New buildings become an issue of debate [on whether they should be green]. The old ones are grandfathered. But I think there are some tenants in new properties who are willing to pay an extra few dollars a square foot for something that is good for the environment," said Lee District Planning Commissioner Rodney Lusk.

According to the Department of Energy, weatherization reduces heating bills by an average of 31 percent and overall energy bills by more than \$350 a year.

The number of companies

that advertise their eco-friendliness is rising, and compared "to five years ago, it was never a criteria," said Jon Peterson of Fairfax-based developer The Peterson Cos.

Although LEED and Energy Star accreditation increase development costs anywhere from 5 to 15 percent, the implementation of environmentally conscious standards makes for higher sales prices, higher rents and lower operating costs.

"For a developer who incorporates green initiatives at one property, the developer next door who doesn't is at a competitive disadvantage," Peterson said.

Last February, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors passed a measure ensuring that all new county buildings meet minimum green building standards. This fall the board will vote on a measure that would offer incentives to developers who build to environmentally friendly standards.

With "higher fuel prices, climate change, there is an interest in the community to build to higher environmental standards. It's just the way of the future," said Braddock District Supervisor Sharon Bulova (D).