



Nature's Bin Human Resources Compliance Manager Kenya Banks: "The staff really being out there in the community being able to give

STORY AND PHOTO BY  
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**D**edicated from the get-go to training and empowering people with disabilities, Nature's Bin affords the same type of respect to the environment.

Now in its 36<sup>th</sup> year, the Lakewood-based natural foods market and its nonprofit parent organization, Cornucopia, live by a few simple rules of sustainability. Leading by example are 46 full-time employees and 19 part-time employees who recycle paper, cardboard, glass, metal, and plastics. Slip up, and they'll make it known.

"A couple of them take it really seriously and will correct you," Kenya Banks, the human

resources compliance manager at Nature's Bin, says. "They take ownership in that."

And that's how it has always been for Executive Director Scott Duennes and his organization.

"We've been a social enterprise since 1975, but we didn't know there was a name for it until about five years ago," Mary Johnson, the company's director of development and marketing, says.

Besides recycling, the sustainability efforts of Nature's Bin include:

**REUSABLE GROCERY BAGS** — Nature's Bin has given away or sold more than 6,000 reusable cloth grocery bags while encouraging its customers to move away from paper and plastic bags. In the process, the store has reduced the number of plastic bags used by

more than 4,000 bags per month. Additionally, Nature's Bin switched from blue poly bags to green degradable bags that are made from 100 percent recycled plastic and paper bags made from 100 percent recycled paper.

**SUPPORT FOR LOCAL FARMERS** — The local Amish farms that Nature's Bin supports use sustainable farming methods to grow their crops, including horse-drawn plows and hand harvesting. With the help of local distribution companies, all local products are picked up at central locations and delivered to the store. Often one truck will haul produce, grains, maple syrup, and other items from a particular county.

**RE-LAMPING THE STORE** — In 2009, Nature's Bin re-lamped its entire retail store and replaced halogen fixtures that were 17 years old. The effort was supported

by a grant from the Cleveland Foundation. Local electricians at Clock Electric estimate that the fixtures are providing a 17 percent improvement in efficiency.

**BULK PRODUCTS** — Nature's Bin offers a large assortment of foods in bulk, which reduces product waste by allowing consumers to purchase only as much as they need. In addition, bulk purchases are economically priced and reduce excessive packaging.

Some of those initiatives were exemplified April 17 at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo, where Nature's Bin was contracted to cater EarthFest 2011, the longest running Earth Day celebration in the United States.

"What's awesome is that a lot of our staff are socially responsible people," Banks says. "The staff really enjoys being out there in the community, being able to give back."

While Nature's Bin and Cornucopia excel in their sustainability and wellness efforts, their mission to provide real-life work experience to people with disabilities has been the top priority since Day 1. Each year more than 200 people with significant physical or mental disabilities learn basic work and social skills under the eye of specially trained coaches and other full-time staff professionals. Following an average of eight to 12 weeks of on-the-job training, trainees work with Cornucopia's placement professionals to find permanent jobs in other companies throughout the community.

Banks could not be happier since joining the company last August.

"When I came in and learned about the mission, I knew that was something I could sink my teeth into and be happy doing the

work," she says. "Not just doing HR work but mission-based work. It's been good for me."

In turn, Banks is bent on making work an enjoyable experience for the employees of Nature's Bin and Cornucopia. The organizations often celebrate milestone achievements, including trainee graduations and employee promotions. Families are invited. Rewards include pizza parties and chocolate-covered pretzels.

"There's typically tears. People are happy because they've accomplished something," Banks says. "Put yourself in the family's shoes — if you had a child who maybe didn't experience a lot of success, and now they're being applauded. That's a great thing to do and to see. You can't beat that." ■

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