

# Making Green Concessions

At San Francisco ballpark, sustainability doesn't have to come out of left field

BY MARDEEN GORDON



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**T**HE CRACK OF THE BAT, the cheering of the fans, the smell of garlic fries wafting over the stands, and the invisible aura of ecological sustainability are all part of the ambiance in at least one ballpark this summer. Let's hope the effort to

go green will continue to inspire a trend across industries and around the world.

The San Francisco Giants are committed to making AT&T Park the greenest ballpark in the country, pursuing a number of initiatives, many of them in partnership with Pacific Gas & Electric, to qualify as the first Major League ballpark to receive U.S. Green Building Council certification for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for Existing Buildings, Operations and Maintenance (EBO&M). One of the steps they have taken in that direction is the creation of the ballpark's first green garlic fries stand.

To accomplish the transformation, the standard lights were replaced with



The Gilroy Garlic Fries stand at AT&T Park in San Francisco has made an effort to be a green concession stand, right down to the signage.



high-lumen lights and ballast lamp starters, which are the most efficient tube (T8) lights and starters available and use 36.5 percent less electricity. The paint used to repaint the stand "green" is environmentally friendly. The drink cups are recyclable, and the paper boats and carry trays are compostable. Approximately 800 pounds of garlic fries are prepared in this stand per game, and its new energy efficient appliances are estimated to save enough energy to fry an additional 110 tons of garlic fries.

The rebranding of the stand is completed by the signage, provided by EcoSignWorks of Walnut Creek, Calif., and made entirely of biodegradable and recyclable materials. Founded by Richard Abbott in 1980 as SignWorks, the name recently was changed to represent a new commitment to sustainability and environmental responsibility.

In 2000, SignWorks became part of the team that built and opened AT&T Park, (then named Pacific Bell Park), and they have provided all of the outfield signage ever since. Danny Dann of the Giants organization explained that they were aware of the environmental focus of EcoSignWorks, and when they decided to "green up" the garlic fries stand, they knew exactly where to turn for the signage.

The stand was chosen because of its prominent placement in the park, where nearly every fan is likely to pass by it at least once during a game. Since the stand produces only one product, garlic fries, there would be less variety of fixtures to replace, giving the project a greater percentage of return on the investment. The popularity of the garlic fries also makes promotion of the concept more effective. Curious fans waiting in line will be able to read the sign at the booth, giving

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Although EcoSignWorks had to make extra signs dedicated just to the promotion of the concession stands' conservation efforts, at least the signs are made entirely of biodegradable and recyclable materials.

For most of the signs, the Gilroy stand employs Duraplast Biodegradable foam board from Gilman Brothers.



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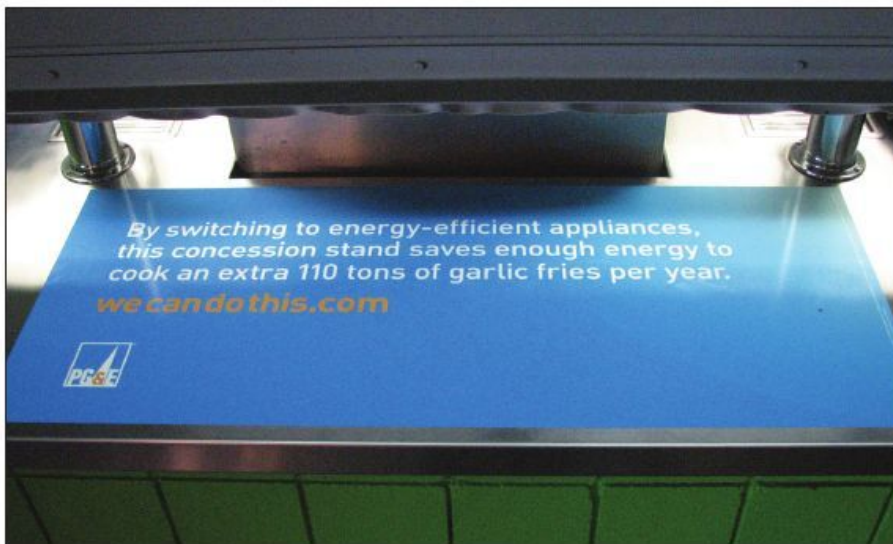
credit to all of the contributors and partners and explaining the measures that were taken.

And what happened to the existing signs, which were in perfectly good condition? Were they tossed in the dumpster to survive for centuries in some landfill? No, they will continue serving their purpose on one of the other 10 or so garlic fries stands elsewhere in the park. Perhaps by the time all of the signs in the park are replaced with eco-friendly materials, we will have solved the dilemma of disposal of the older, more problematic sign materials.

Although EcoSignWorks did not make the original garlic fries signs, they were able to faithfully recreate the sculptural elements and specific colors and finishes using materials made with recycled content and designed to degrade within one to five years in landfill conditions. Duraplast Biodegradable foamboard from Gilman Brothers performs identically to their original Duraplast product but is formulated with "bio resins," which decompose in a bacteria-rich environment, leaving nothing but harmless compost. Richard put considerable time and effort into researching and testing new materials as they became available and encourages every sign maker to evaluate his or her material options to find the most sustainable alternatives for that particular region and customer base.

He says that although the industry is developing new products and improving practices in response to social pressures, greener materials still tend to be more costly than their conventional counterparts. He continues to promote them and use them, even when it means the profit margin is less, because following best practices is the right thing to do, and he believes that he is establishing his company solidly in the niche of sustainable signage, which will bring greater returns, as they ride the crest of the green wave in the near future.

This has been a personal passion of his for some time, and EcoSignWorks is green certified and has been recycling materials within its shop for years.



EcoSignWorks, which provided the signs for the stand, encourages customers to return their signs at the end of use so that disposal can be handled properly.

EcoSignWorks now encourages customers to return signs at the end of use so that their disposal can be handled properly. Re-use of sign materials still is not a viable option in most cases because customers expect pristine materials in their new signs and would demand a discount otherwise. The reality is that the labor to remove the graphics and clean the substrate actually would end up making the sign *more* expensive. It will take time for public perception to change, to accept recycled signs as more socially positive despite their obvious previous use, the way we now seek out recycled paper, even when there are a few visible specks in the smooth white surface.

The change of name to EcoSignWorks has invited new customers and sparked conversation with existing ones. With the current economic situation, it is difficult to tell whether some clients have gone elsewhere because of philosophical differences or financial constraints, but Richard continues to hold to his principles because this is not about saving the planet; the earth will survive long after we are gone. It's up to us to keep ourselves alive by finding equilibrium and protecting the resources that we depend on to survive.

Customers frequently require some education about their signs, and sustainability issues are no exception. They often need to be reassured that the materials will break down only in the landfill, not on the front of their building. People are curious and concerned, and

EcoSignWorks receives some calls just looking for information on materials, sometimes from other sign companies. Their interest is understandable, but a busy sign shop needs to stay focused on its own work flow, not becoming a resource for its competitors.

Manufacturers and suppliers are happy to provide information on new products, and many Web sites promote their "green" practices and developments in materials.

This magazine offers information and guidance for finding sustainable products in almost every issue. It is a big topic of conversation everywhere you turn, and the time is right for every one of us to do our part, asking our regular suppliers and reaching out for new sources, educating our customers and encouraging our employees and neighbors to reduce, re-use and recycle.

Fortunately, the Giants did not need any encouragement to seek out sustainable sign materials, and they knew exactly where to go to find the right company for the job. With such a popular and high-profile example of sustainable practices, the Gilroy Garlic Fries stand should help to spread the word and raise awareness among the millions of fans that gobble up their tasty, garlicky goodness while enjoying a great game of Giants baseball. **sdg**

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