



CLEAN WATER IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS ★ CASE STUDY

Tiny Diner, Minneapolis, MN



Urban farming and appetizing fare with a healthy mission

A restaurant and urban farm in Minneapolis named **Tiny Diner** is making a big impression with operations based on a low-impact, sustainable model. From solar panels to water catchment systems, Tiny Diner continually works to reduce the company's impacts on the environment. In doing so, Tiny Diner has become a thriving example of a popular, sustainable business, leading the way in healthy watershed management. It is also an inspiring example of how a serious sustainability mission can provide a business unique brand-building opportunities, even in a competitive arena like restaurants. Tiny Diner includes its sustainability story in its marketing outreach, and reinforces its educational and entertainment advantage with engaging on-site attractions. Customers who share its sustainability values and principles will travel the extra mile to eat at Tiny Diner. They appreciate the restaurant's direct contributions to healthier water and air, and enjoy learning about sustainability from its educational facilities.

Says **Kim Bartmann**, Tiny Diner's founder and owner,

“Clean air and clean water are vital for any business. If restaurants exist to feed people, people must be healthy enough to eat.”

How one landowner protects the watershed with green stormwater infrastructure

The Mississippi River watershed comprises 1.2 million square miles, or 40% of the continental U.S. Virtually every business in this vast area has a stake in the watershed's healthy condition, and Tiny Diner is committed to doing its part.

Tiny Diner has reduced stormwater runoff by reducing impermeable surfaces on its site, and is managing remaining runoff with a variety of green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) installations. When Tiny Diner took over the property, they removed the parking lot with impermeable surfacing and replaced it with an outdoor patio covered by a solar array. This solar array features gutters which catch rainwater and lead it to a downspout planter and a rain chain that directs the water to a 500-gallon tank. The collected stormwater is used for an on-site garden planted with crops that are used at the restaurant. Crop rotations, perennial plants, and on-site composting are used to maintain soil health in the garden, improving its ability to retain water. Tiny Diner also plans to add a green roof atop the restaurant's garden shed.

Green roofs, along with specially prepared soil and carefully chosen plants in the rain garden, reduce stormwater runoff and filter out any pollutants in the runoff that remain.

By replicating on its property the natural hydrological cycle, Tiny Diner is doing its part to reduce flooding that periodically disrupts business in Minneapolis and reduce pollution entering Minnehaha Creek and from there, the Mississippi River itself.



Engaging consumers in water conservation and sustainability

Tiny Diner's green infrastructure installations not only contribute to a healthier watershed, but also provide educational opportunities on sustainable practices for the restaurant's customers. Tiny Diner maintains informational signs and other reading materials, and offers classes in

partnership with the Permaculture Research Institute Cold Climate and Master Water Stewards of the Freshwater Society and the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District. Classes offered have included gardening, beekeeping, and expert water stewardship.

Incentivizing more Minnesota businesses to adopt stormwater management

Tiny Diner is a leader on sustainable water management because of its owner's values, but we must quickly increase participation by a strong majority of businesses and private landowners. Incentives must be instituted to help them incorporate green stormwater infrastructure that reduces their contribution to flooding and water pollution in

Minneapolis. One possible route forward is to change the way the local government charges for provision of water and sewer services. Currently, when a new business opens in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan District, the business is assessed a charge for water and sewer service based on the square-foot usage of the property. Local governments should instead lower costs assigned to businesses that reduce stormwater runoff on their properties, thus lowering their use of sewer services. Such an incentive for on-site stormwater management is a fair way to let businesses earn significant savings for reducing their impact on the city's sewage system. ★

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