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New Business Making Environmental Waves
Ripple Glass Announces Metro-Wide Glass Recycling Program

Kansas City, Mo. - With environmental awareness growing daily, no one feels good about throwing away perfectly good glass. Even so, last year nearly 150 million pounds of post-consumer glass, such as beer bottles, wine bottles and pickle jars, ended up in metro area landfills.

To the dismay of the people at Boulevard Brewing Company that included some 10 million empty Boulevard bottles. "It's a big number," said Mike Utz, plant engineer for the regional craft brewer, "and because of our steady growth, it's only getting bigger." Company officials grew increasingly frustrated as they watched those bottles – and all of the energy, labor and material used to make them – get buried underground and lost forever.

Meanwhile, Kansas City businesses use large quantities of processed recycled glass. Owens Corning, the nation's leading fiberglass maker, operates a major plant in the Fairfax industrial district. For a variety of sound economic and environmental reasons, they prefer to produce fiberglass insulation using recycled glass instead of raw materials. But the absence of a local processing facility meant no meaningful local glass recycling, forcing the company to obtain its recycled glass from distant sources and to use far less than they would like.

After years of study – and in a first-of-its-kind effort – Boulevard Brewing Company founder and president John McDonald, chief financial officer Jeff Krum and plant engineer Mike Utz have teamed up with local companies DST Systems, Inc. and UMB Financial Corp. to form Ripple Glass. A fully localized glass recycling and reclamation system with economic and environmental benefits built into every step, Ripple is constructing a state-of-the-art processing facility and developing a metro-wide glass collection system.

Allies such as Deffenbaugh Industries will facilitate the process. Dozens of local businesses and municipalities will participate by hosting glass recycling bins, and the public will be encouraged to save and recycle used glass food and beverage containers at some 60 sites strategically located throughout the metro area.

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Customers such as Owens Corning will use the processed recycled glass, keeping it out of area landfills while saving raw materials and dramatically reducing energy consumption and emission. And the product – fiberglass insulation – will save still more energy.

The potential impact is in step with the waste diversion goals and priorities of the Mid-America Regional Council (MARC) Solid Waste Management District (SWMD), a regional solid waste planning agency serving local governments on the Missouri side of the Kansas City metro area. Ripple was awarded a grant to purchase 40 collection bins and support a public awareness and education campaign based on the outcomes of a prior grant-funded feasibility study. “Ripple Glass is bringing the collection and processing pieces together to give the region a closed-loop system for glass recycling,” said Lisa Danbury, MARC’s Solid Waste program manager and SWMD planner. Market development projects for glass have been a district priority for the past several years. The project is funded in part by the MARC SWMD and the Missouri Department of Natural Resources.

Gale Tedhams, Owens Corning Director of Sustainability, underscored the value of the local “ripple effect” saying, “For every piece of glass we recycle, we not only reduce waste but put the glass to work as insulation to help increase energy efficiency.” The recycled glass goes a long way: from just one recycled six-pack of beverage bottles, Owens Corning will produce enough insulation to fill a standard home wall cavity.

Ripple Glass partners DST Systems and UMB Financial Corp. see the effort as a blend of entrepreneurial vision and environmental activism.

“The Ripple Glass business model is compelling,” said Tom McDonnell, CEO of DST Systems. “We’re behind this initiative because it addresses both the recycling and the re-sale of discarded glass, supporting not only the environment, but our local economy. Ripple’s notion of 100-mile recycling is an idea that makes a lot of sense.”

Mariner Kemper, Chairman and CEO of UMB Financial Corp., added, “The glass recycling rate in Kansas City now stands at only 5 percent, compared to a national average of nearly 30 percent. We believe that Ripple Glass can make a real difference. And when an initiative like this produces a positive environmental and economic impact on our community, everyone wins.”

Ripple officials indicated that most of the 60 initial collection sites have now been identified, with bin placement scheduled to begin the first week in November. A current list of recycling locations is available on the Ripple Glass Web site, <http://www.rippleglasskc.com>.

Photos available for download at <http://www.janemobley.com/media-RippleGlass.html>.

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