

# Missoulian

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### **Glassy project - Credit union seeks recyclables to help construct new building**

*By TYLER CHRISTENSEN of the Missoulian*



**Joni Walker, marketing director** for Missoula Federal Credit Union, holds recycled glass and fly ash building material that will be used in the construction of a new branch in Missoula. The credit union is asking for donations of empty glass containers that will be pulverized this weekend for building material. Photo by TOM BAUER/Missoulian

It's time to drag out all those glass bottles that have been piling up and put them to good use.

Through this weekend only, Missoula Federal Credit Union is asking people to donate any empty glass containers they may have lying around to help build its newest branch, which will be constructed almost entirely of renewable, recycled and locally made products.

While clean, de-labeled containers are easier to pulverize, the credit union isn't about to be picky. It will need to collect an estimated 300 to 400 tons of pulverized glass.

"We will take anything and everything we can get for glass," said the credit union's marketing director, Joni Walker. "It's going to be really hard for us to get too much."

Some of the glass will be sorted by color and mixed with fly ash, a waste product generated by coal-fired plants, to form the lobby floor inside the 6,000-square-foot building. Glass aggregate will also be used in place of gravel and concrete throughout the building and property, right down to the landscaping, Walker said.

Ultimately, the credit union is hoping its efforts will earn the building a gold- or platinum-level Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, a national nonprofit that has registered fewer than 5,300 LEED-certified buildings in the world since expanding the program to cover new construction in 2000.

Missoula Federal Credit Union's sixth branch, located on Russell Street next to the NorthWestern Energy building, will be its first seeking LEED certification - although its branch in Stevensville was built using many of the same environmentally sustainable concepts, Walker said.

Residents of western Montana are careful with their environment, and the credit union feels it's appropriate to make building decisions that reflect that care, she explained. The

credit union's president, Gary Clark, and its seven-member board of directors also feel it's important to promote the health and well-being of their employees, she said.

For those reasons, Missoula Federal Credit Union is willing to look beyond the immediate construction costs, which will probably run between 5 percent and 10 percent higher than a building that didn't meet LEED standards.

"The beauty of it is, we will recoup that in energy use eventually," Walker said.

The single-story building is being designed to capture the maximum amount of sunlight to minimize the use of artificial lights, she said, and will use solar panels as well. It will also use renewable materials, such as sunflower seed board and cotton insulation, and recycled products such as counters and exterior siding made of post-consumer recycled paper.

The credit union expects to move into its new branch by the end of next summer.

"I'm so excited about this building," Walker said. "It's going to be an amazing thing for Missoula to see."

A lot of homes in the area have been built using sustainable materials and concepts, she noted, but very few commercial buildings in Missoula have gone "green." With its new project, Missoula Federal Credit Union aims to demonstrate that it's a viable model.

It would be wonderful, Walker added, if the new branch prompted other businesses to use recycled glass for their construction projects. That would help create a local market that could lead to an ongoing glass recycling program, she said.

"This is not a long-term glass recycling solution," Walker emphasized. "This is a one-time shot for people to get rid of all the glass they want recycled, hopefully just until the next local project comes around."

"Everybody wants to recycle glass, but you can't just pulverize it and leave it," she continued. "You have to do something with it."

That's been a big part of the problem with Missoula's past glass-recycling efforts.

Missoula has flirted with glass recycling programs for years, but none has managed to stick. Most recently, Missoula Valley Recycling stopped accepting glass in March 2006 after watching its pile of crushed glass grow and grow - with nowhere to go.

"The problem is, if you crush glass into cullet and sand, you can't compete with other aggregate in the state of Montana because basically Montana is made up of sand and gravel," said Missoula Valley Recycling office manager Darin Austin.

He estimated that a ton of processed glass produced at a small field would cost upward of \$100, while a ton of sand or gravel can be delivered for about \$10.

He added that Missoula Valley Recycling would gladly accept glass once again if it could be assured of a sustainable program. It just doesn't want its customers to get used to recycling glass, only to learn there's no market for it again.

Statewide, the market for pulverized glass appears to be growing, said Dusti Johnson, a recycling and market specialist with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality.

The DEQ offers a program, run by the Helena-based nonprofit Headwaters Cooperative Recycling, that brings a mobile pulverizing machine to different communities in the state to encourage glass recycling. It typically brings the machine whenever big construction projects call for a lot of pulverized glass.

"They are starting to increase," Johnson said. "We've done one in Billings, a couple in Helena, and now we're going to have some big projects here (in Missoula). This one (for

Missoula Federal Credit Union) is a big project.”

The DEQ will have its mobile pulverizing machine on hand at Missoula Federal Credit Union's new branch site Friday through Sunday to pulverize all the glass that's brought in.

The project has already raised one large roll-off dumpster full of glass, said Matt Hisel, a partner at Home Resource.

“The response has been very enthusiastic,” he said. “We've had - I don't know how many people - but probably hundreds come by to drop off their glass. It's been very successful. Clearly Missoulians really want to see their glass recycled.”

Home Resource agreed to help Missoula Federal Credit Union collect glass because it supports recycling efforts, he explained. The worry is that Missoulians will prove so enthusiastic, they will continue dropping off glass after the cut-off date.

“Please understand that it ends (after this weekend),” Hisel pleaded.

He pointed out that the “vast majority” of glass containers he's collected so far have been beer bottles, so after the glass drive ends recycle-minded individuals can ease their consciences by filling up at local breweries with a reusable growler.

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#### Collection locations

Bring your glass containers to Missoula Federal Credit Union's construction site on Russell Street, next to NorthWestern Energy, during their glass drive Friday through Sunday. Home Resource, located at 825 Kent St., also will accept glass through Thursday.