

**Oregon State Bar  
Sustainable Future Section**

Photo: J. Michael Mattingly

# The Long View

## Sustainability for the Holidays

*By William Kabeiseman*

The holidays can be a challenging time for practicing sustainability. Year-end demands on time, long-standing traditions and other concerns make it easy to fall back on unsustainable habits. However, the holiday environment also provides opportunities to make real sustainable choices that can benefit client relationships and the bottom line.

One holiday tradition is gift giving. Some attorneys in our firm provide gifts to clients or referral sources in recognition of their relationship. The gifts can take a variety of forms, including gift baskets, packages of fruit or other similar options.

One attorney, who is on the office's sustainability committee, noted that the gifts selected out of a catalogue were often from a company across the country, included unsustainably produced products and were shipped without much thought as to sustainability. The committee decided that there had to be a better approach.

The committee's first step was to review our client list to see if any of our existing clients produce a suitable year-end gift. We spoke to some of the firm's attorneys to see whether we might have clients who produce appropriate gifts and do so in a sustainable fashion. Our clients include a wide variety of people and companies and, as it turns out, some of our clients included bakers and wine makers who produce their goods sustainably.

Next, we considered the recipient clients and what they might like; some recipients might be wine connoisseurs and would really appreciate a bottle of good wine. Others may have small offices that would enjoy a delivery of cookies. We used this opportunity to ensure that the gifts matched the client.

We also discussed purchasing gift certificates and charitable contribu-

tions. Both of those options also significantly cut down on transportation costs and could be locally sourced. Ultimately, we did not choose these options, largely because of our desire to purchase from our already existing clients. However, such gifts, especially charitable donations, could further a sustainable cause important to you or to the recipient.

By purchasing locally produced goods and delivering them locally, we could order baked holiday goods, such as cookies or other treats, and have them delivered while still fresh. For those further away, sustainability could be addressed by making sure the product was produced by an entity that followed good sustainable practices. In most cases, the gift turned out to be wine, which was provided by a firm client who was committed to sustainability.

We found that our purchases of holiday gift purchases had additional benefits beyond just supporting sustainability and the local economy. The costs of the gifts tended to be less than a gift basket, but were perceived as more thoughtful and targeted. The shipping costs were also generally less because most recipients were in the same area.

In the end, the only impediment to making the switch was the need to recognize an opportunity and ask for a different approach. The recipients of the gifts were impressed with the fresh baked goods or nice wine. In addition, the clients supplying the gifts were grateful for the additional orders and the recognition of their products. Our gifting program may not have the largest impact on sustainability, but it helps to build personal relationships with clients and fosters a conscientious attitude toward purchasing of products, both of which are important to move sustainability forward. ■

*William Kabeiseman is Of Counsel with law firm Garvey Schubert Barer.*