Doing the Right Thing

by Jane Whittington. Photo by Terri Shaver.

Delta Dental is in the process of expanding and renovating its current Okemos headquarters and constructing both a new office building and a new data center, reflecting continued growth and the need for more space and personnel. But why are they going to the extra effort to make sure that the project will be a green plan? “Because it’s the right thing to do,” said Ellen Jones, senior public relations officer for Delta Dental of Michigan, Ohio and Indiana.

“Delta Dental has always been committed to the health of its customers and its community and insuring that our buildings are energy efficient and environmentally sensitive is part of that commitment.”

Delta Dental has been providing dental benefits for its customers since its inception over 50 years ago. Founded as Michigan Dental Service Corporation in 1957, Delta Dental now has affiliates in Ohio, Indiana and Tennessee and provides coverage for more than six million enrollees in over 4,000 organizations. Some Michigan customers include General Motors, Chrysler, State of Michigan and Michigan Public School Employees Retirement System. Through its philanthropic affiliate, the Delta Dental Foundation, they give more than a million dollars a year to programs that improve health and strengthen communities. Since 2000, Delta Dental has administered Michigan’s Healthy Kids Dental Program in partnership with the Michigan Department of Community Health.

Delta Dental’s plans include an expansion of its current headquarters from 160,000 square feet to 195,000 square feet while also constructing an 91,500-square-foot office building and a 22,500-square-foot data center. The company anticipates adding up to 150 new knowledge-based jobs over a ten-year period; these jobs will be created to support the company’s business growth initiatives. Construction and renovation will begin in August of 2008.

According to Jones, “Besides using green construction materials and
practices in the buildings, the grounds will be rejuvenated with native ground covers, prairie grasses, wildflowers, rain gardens and trees. We also plan to develop our grounds as a natural wildlife habitat. There will be walking trails for our employees and for the community.”

Dennis Louney, representative government and community relations, added, “We are working with the Michigan Department of Education to develop a curriculum around our plantings and wildlife refuge. Schools will be able to bring their students to our facility to study the flora and fauna and also to help us maintain the plantings and the refuge.

“We have also been working with the drain commission to reshape our pond and insure that it will be cleansed and filtered by our plantings and that the new configuration will control sediment and assure that the water flowing into the Red Cedar River is clean.”

Jones added, “Recycled building materials will be used whenever possible and the building design will maximize natural light. A green roof will be constructed on part of the renovated building and will give us natural thermal insulation.”

The plan also includes parking lot expansion, much of which will be constructed of permeable pavement materials and will feature a nearby fountain.

Delta Dental plans to seek a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification from the U.S. Green Building Council and will also seek certification from the Wildlife Habitat Council for its efforts to develop sustainable habitats on the 57-acre campus.

“Sixty-eight buildings in Michigan are LEED certified. Of those certified, 15
are gold, and that's what we're aiming for,” said Jones.

As part of their commitment to the environment, Delta Dental is a member of the Meridian Commercial Recycling Group (MCRG), which promotes business efforts to become more environmentally friendly. As part of this, the MCRG has created a commercial recycling program.

In April 2008, Delta Dental was honored with a Green Star for recycling nearly 14 tons of paper and also for recycling its pond water, using it to irrigate its grounds. Delta Dental plays an active role in the Green Star Program and in the Go Green! Initiative which works to raise awareness in neighborhoods, schools and the business community.

More information about commercial recycling and becoming a Green Star recipient can be found on the township's website, www.meridian.mi.us.

“While this is a Meridian Township program, we are certainly open to including businesses and organizations outside of the township. Those who receive a Green Star get a decal to put in the window of their business and are recognized at public events throughout the year,” said Louney. The idea for the awards came from Louney and Malinda Barr, president of the Meridian Area Business Association.

Delta Dental remains committed to their customers and their community. They believe that Michigan is a great place for their employees to live and work and remain committed not only to being part of that future but also contributing to it.