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Rockford-based Specialty Screw Corp.: 'Conservative minded' and 'seeking zero waste'

This story is part of our Transform Rockford coverage on sustainability efforts in the Rock River Valley. The content will publish in the March 1 edition of the Register Star. Read more at rrstar.com/transformrockford.

ROCKFORD — Sitting on Russ Johansson's desk is a small container with a handful of precision-crafted fasteners, screws, rivets and bolts.

After talking to the [Specialty Screw Corp.](#) president, it was hard to tell which he is more proud of: the products or his energy-efficient and environmentally friendly plant at 2801 Huffman Blvd., where the products are made.

Established in 1953 primarily for the auto industry, Specialty Screw Corp. is all about high-quality production and little waste.

"Eighty percent of what we produce is for the auto industry's door systems, seat systems and electrical systems," Johansson said. "They are precision parts. In making them, we've eliminated all waste in the processing of those parts.

"The only waste we actually generate and landfill is from the food that we consume — the wrappers and things of that sort. We recycle all of our metals and oils and cardboard and aluminum cans from our employees. We're trying to get to zero waste, but we haven't gotten to that point yet."

Under Johansson's direction, Specialty Screw:

- Reduced its aqueous solvents — water-based cleaning fluids — by 50 percent.
- Reduced lighting consumption by replacing T12 fluorescent lamps with T8s.
- Doubled the roof's insulation.
- Used a \$30,000 state grant to help pay for the \$105,000 installation of a 17-kilowatt photo voltaic solar system. The rooftop solar panels generate enough energy to run the building on a Sunday when the plant is not in operation.
- And rebuilt and repurposed old equipment such as coal headers.

Specialty Screw's most impressive green initiative is a man-made, five-acre prairie located behind the company's parking lot, a cost-efficient effort to address excess run-off water created by two surrounding businesses and a 1994 addition to the Specialty Screw plant.

"We had a parking lot that was a foot deep at times with rain water," he said. "So when we put the 1994 addition on, we looked at hooking up with the storm sewer, which was about a \$20,000 cost, or whether we could run a drain into the field and create like a water detention area."

The funneled water irrigates the prairie and it recharges an underground aquifer.

"We have everything in that prairie," Johansson said. "We have fox, deer, turkeys and a whole assemblance of birds and insects."

Specialty Screw was recognized in 2008 by the [Natural Land Institute](#), when it received the George and Barbara Fell Award. The award, named after the founders of the Institute, is presented to individuals and groups for accomplishments that significantly advance natural area preservation, management and restoration in northern Illinois.

In 2013, the company also installed a bioswale, which helps drain water to a depressed area on the property.

"We are using rainwater as a resource as opposed to a waste," Johansson said.

[Keep Northern Illinois Beautiful](#) named Specialty Screw its Environmental Steward of the Year in 2014.

"They're always looking at ways to be conservative minded," KNIB Director Lori Gummow said. "They do it with their own initiative, and it comes from the top down."

Chet Kolodziej is executive director of Freedom Field, a model business and research-and-development center for alternative energy located on the grounds of the Rock River Water Reclamation District.

He said Specialty Screw Corp.'s conservation efforts make for good business.

"By reducing energy costs, it allows them to keep people employed and stay competitive."



Machine operator Bill Scheln tosses a finished product into a bin after inspecting it Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2015, at Specialty Screw in Rockford. MAX GERSH/RRSTAR.COM

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