

THE WILLOW SCHOOL

March 20, 2012

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Please accept this letter as support for Anthony Sblendorio's nomination for Person of the Year.

Anthony epitomizes the very essence of the "new" green movement. He is a true pioneer. He continues to use new ways of thinking to solve traditional problems that conventional methods cannot solve. He is one of those rare people who just won't take no for an answer. In early 2000, when no one understood the concept of sustainability, Anthony was talking about it to anyone who would listen. But unlike many people, he did not stop pushing the envelope. As nature continues to evolve, so did Anthony's thinking. Now Anthony is pushing his clients to think beyond the conventional idea of sustainability to a new way of thinking that is regenerative, recognizing that man and nature are one and humans can actually interact with nature and participate with nature in a way that elevates the expression of both man and nature.

I met Anthony approximately twelve years ago. My wife and I were just starting to think about founding an elementary school in Gladstone, NJ.

We wanted to start a school that emphasized mastery of the English language, a school that combined academic excellence with the joy and wonder of learning, and a school that was rooted in a strong virtues program, grounded in the ancient Aristotelian cardinal virtues. The concept of sustainability was not on our radar screen.

The very first time I met Anthony, he stated talking about the great opportunity we had in starting a school and how we should explore the possibilities of "going green" and incorporating sustainability into the school's very fabric. Remember, this was early 2000, before anyone was really talking about green and sustainability.

At the time, we did not pay much attention to what he was saying and went on with our business. But Anthony was not finished with us. He kept calling and discussing why we should incorporate sustainability into our thinking. Then he brought the United States Green Building Council and LEED into our conversation, two things I had never even heard of. Finally all of Anthony's advice and encouragement paid off. The conversations started making sense, so much sense that a huge light bulb went off and we had an incredible "Ah Ha" moment. We began questioning our relationship with nature and the traditional view that man is here to have dominion and control over nature and that we, as humans, are separate from nature and began to see ourselves as a part of nature.



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This new way of thinking invited us to move from our view of standing apart from and using nature, to being a part of nature; participating and co-evolving with our natural systems; and understanding ourselves as integral with nature.

We began exploring Aristotle's writings and quickly recognized the inextricable link between human virtue and ecology. From our virtues program, which was designed to mentor the ethical relationships between humans, grew the commitment to mentoring that same ethical relationship between humans and our natural world and for developing a sense of personal stewardship and love for the earth. The virtues program now became a model of both ethical relationships between people as well as those same ethical relationships between people and the natural systems that support us.

It was at this point, because of Anthony's persistence, that the concept of sustainability was incorporated into the life of the school. We instructed the architects to take a time out and went back to our Board of Trustees and began discussing how building a green school and having an ethical relationship with nature was actually integral to the Mission of the school. The board agreed and we went back to our design team and started the conversation about designing a USGBC LEED Gold building.

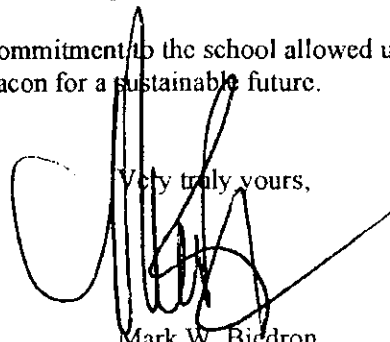
All through this process, Anthony was right there, encouraging us to continually think outside of the box. He brought new people into the conversation, people that have been with us in this continuing conversation to this day.

Our school built the first USGBC LEED Gold certified building in the country in 2003. It became a national model of educational reform and 21st Century education. Our second building, completed in 2007, achieved USGBC Platinum Certification. Anthony was involved in all aspects of the design of both buildings and his landscape design firm, Back to Nature, designed and installed all the native landscape, including the innovative constructed wetlands wastewater treatment system and the stormwater management systems.

But most importantly, Anthony has stayed with us throughout the development of the school. He is now a member of the Board of Trustees and is chair of the Development Committee. In both roles, he continues to inspire our entire school community to think about our relationship with the natural systems that support us and the long-term consequences of our actions.

Anthony's involvement, passion and commitment to the school allowed us to be what we are today -- a model for educational reform and a beacon for a sustainable future.

Very truly yours,



Mark W. Biedron
Co-Founder
The Willow School

