

Chocolate maker's grand plan to save energy

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By HENRY BAURESS

ONE of Kildare's best known companies is taking the initiative to cut down its energy costs.

Lily O'Briens, set up in 1992 by Mary Ann O'Brien, is now famous for its chocolate. But just recently the company's founder and its staff have joined up with the non profit Ecology Foundation to cut down on waste. The move is both for the sake of the planet and good business sense.

On 22 April, Earth Day, Green Party member and Leixlip Town Councillor, Shane Fitzgerald, was at the Newbridge premises to cut the ribbon on the project.

If making a major change seems a tall order for any company, particularly one operating in a very competitive environment like Lily O'Briens, it should be recalled that there was a time when the chocolate experts like the Swiss and Belgian laughed at the idea of Ireland producing a similar product.

Ms O'Brien and her extended clan - there are now 129 working for the company plus another 200 during peak production periods - have disabused many of that notion.

The company, which has won an Irish Food and Drink Exporter of the Year award among others, believes it can cut down on energy needs as well to market its product around the world.

In January, staff at the company met Gerard Bennett, the director, and Tracey Godfrey, the project manager, of the Ecology Foundation. They looked at a number of areas where energy could be saved, including the packaging, paper use. Some areas will be easier than others.

One area is biodegradable boxes but whatever they do produce "must be beautiful", said Mary Ann.

The good news is that runs with customers indicate it is possible to change. "You need something environmentally friendly which won't impact on sales," said Tracey Godfrey.

"We have a dozen companies working with us but the project with Mary Ann is probably the most advanced," said Gerard Bennett.

Anthony Wyse, who is heading up the energy project along with a group what Mary Ann calls the "dream greens", says they have been working on energy savings for the last eight months.

He said that they have cut their electricity bill by 4%.

"The project is a plus for both the environment and the company," said Anthony.

"Every little bit counts," said Mary Ann. Take paper. Last year, the company used 313,000 sheets. It aims to cut that by 5-10% this year.

The Ecology Foundation can be contacted at 01-4532638 or via its website, www.theecologyfoundation.ie.