

# Easton Courier

## **Saint Vincent's Becomes State's First "Green" Hospital**

**By Larissa Lytwyn**

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Saint Vincent's Medical Center in Bridgeport is the first hospital in Connecticut to "go green," substituting chemical cleaners with all-natural products.

The conversion has already begun, department by department, and should be complete by about the end of May.

"These environmentally responsible substances are cost-competitive and just as effective, if not more effective, than standard cleaning products," said Deirdre Imus, founder and president of the Deirdre Imus Environmental Center.

Imus, the wife of national television and radio host Don Imus, has earned a spotlight of her own through her work.

Imus discussed the hospital's "Greening the Cleaning" initiative at the hospital last Thursday.

"It is really Deirdre who inspired us to change," said Susan L. Davis, R.N., president and chief elected official of St. Vincent's Health Services.

Imus said she's always been health-conscious. It was in the late 1990s, however, when she experienced a life-changing flash of insight.

"I was attending a benefit whose proceeds went toward Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) research," Imus said. "I had attended so many benefits like that, where the emphasis was on the treatment or the cure. I thought, what about the root of the problem? What is really behind this? I didn't think there was enough being done on that."

Imus became increasingly concerned that the world's air, food and water were contributing to rising incidence of cancer, asthma and autism.

"Eighty-two thousand of these chemicals are being released into our environment, and 2,000 new chemicals are being introduced each year," he said.

Last December, with guidance from the Environmental Center, Hackensack University Medical Center in New Jersey became one of the country's first "green" hospitals.

"If it can be done in hospitals, it can be done anywhere," Imus said.

This spring, New York and New Jersey passed legislation to phase out toxic cleaning products from its schools.

Imus said it was imperative that similar legislation be passed in other states.

"Although we ran out of time in this session, we are very interested in bringing this much needed legislation to fruition next year," said state Sen. Bill Finch (D-22), who represents Bridgeport, Monroe and Trumbull.

Bridgeport Mayor John Fabrizi lauded Imus' efforts and said he was creating a plan to "green the

cleaning" of five city elementary schools.

"We are the Park City," Fabrizi said. "But we are not nearly green enough."

State Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Gina McCarthy said tracking Connecticut's pollutants was an ongoing struggle.

"As Deirdre will tell you, there are many new contaminants that are being brought into the environment every day," McCarthy said. "We can't do it alone. Deirdre's initiative is a benefit to us all."

Imus said a keystone of the Greening the Cleaning program was education.

"The more we tell people that there are alternatives, the better off we'll all be," Imus said.

The environmental products in Imus' Greening the Cleaning line use natural oils and vinegar instead of chemically produced astringents.

State Atty. Gen. Richard Blumenthal said that Imus was a true leader in what she was doing.

"This is something that needs to be done and is being done," he said.

Imus said she was also committed to working with corporations to change the ingredients in their products.

"We aren't about bankrupting the industry," she said. "We're about creating true change. This is not a trend. This is about rescuing our environment."

In addition to the Greening the Cleaning initiative, St. Vincent's has begun removing and reprocessing waste oils through an industrial provider that eventually will use the recycled products in cosmetics.

There also has been a massive effort to reduce the amount of paper produced in each department.

The new Radiology Information System, for instance, will enable the Radiology Department to go paperless.

The hospital has also long recycled bottles, cans, plastic, paper and cardboard.

"The Greening the Cleaning initiative is only the latest development in St. Vincent's continual goal of being as environmentally responsible as possible," Davis said.