

## Green by design and experience



Lena Lucas, founder of Emerald Healthy Environments -

My Home Green Pages: [www.myhomegreenpages.com](http://www.myhomegreenpages.com)

Green Business Network: [www.gbn.myhomegreenpages.com](http://www.gbn.myhomegreenpages.com)

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Posted on [Green Guide](#) by [Rachel Meacham](#)

"Generally, it's just common sense to be green," says Lena Lucas, founder of Emerald Healthy Environments, LLC.

Dedicated to improving the environmental quality of homes by providing less toxic furniture options, Lucas founded the company after her own daughter became ill following the installation of new furniture in her bedroom in 2005. As her daughter's symptoms increased, Lucas began researching the furniture and discovered the impetus for the skin rash and burning eye sensations.

"The shelving, desk, entertainment center and the entire set-up of her room was made from particle board furniture, which emits formaldehyde," Lucas says.

Lucas did a little digging, and found that formaldehyde can cause short-term symptoms, like her daughter's, but also found long-term exposure can cause cancer. Once she rid her daughter's room of the new furniture, Lucas says her symptoms disappeared within a month. Soon after, Emerald Healthy Environments was born.

"Financially, I was in the position to start the business," she explains, "and so I began a company that would offer alternatives to the traditional custom build-ins in terms of the material we used."

Lucas' business undertaking offers green furniture for offices, closets and kitchens. All of her products are constructed by Amish craftsmen with natural wood, natural lacquer and absolutely no formaldehyde.

"I always wanted to have my own business, be in charge of my own destiny, make my own decisions and do work in the green field after the experiences I have had in the past," Lucas explains.

## **Chernobyl's impact**

The reaction of her daughter, Alena, to the furniture in her bedroom was not the first time Lucas and her family had been adversely affected by environmental hazards.

As a young girl, growing up in Kiev, Lucas lived only 80 miles from the Chernobyl nuclear plant and was a teenager in 1986 when there was a nuclear leak at the facility. Although the reactor explosion happened on April 26, 1986, the people of Kiev didn't hear about the incident until after May 1, 1986. May 1 is a major holiday in the Soviet Union and thousands of people were happily marching in the International Labor Day demonstration, unknowing of the radiation that surrounded them.

Once the information was released, hundreds of thousands of residents were evacuated for months. Lucas was evacuated to the Crimea region for three months, but her father stayed behind to continue working as director of 300 people at a printing factory in Kiev. The government wanted to avoid panic and encouraged adults to stay behind and keep the economy going. Within a year, her father had developed stomach cancer and passed away.

Lucas says it troubled her to know that there was no way for anyone to deal with the situation - other than to be a victim of it.

"The whole idea of the environment impacting us in such a way where we had no choice in what we wanted to do with our lives really impacted me to be sensitive to environmental issues," she recalls.

While still in Kiev, Lucas earned a degree in economics and international marketing from Kiev Polytechnic University. For years, she dreamed of moving to the United States.

"You could be a refugee or you can be a very talented professional, a brain surgeon or something unique, and then you could get a work visa," Lucas says. "Or if you have a lot of money, you could buy a student visa and become a student."

Lucas, however, found another way, literally winning the United States green card lottery that allows 50,000 immigrants a year into the country. Since coming to Indianapolis in 1997, Lucas has earned a general MBA from the Kelley School of Business and worked for a few different companies, such as Morgan Stanley, before starting her own business.

## **The business of being green**

Emerald Healthy Environments is not Lucas' only green business. In October of last year, she launched a new venture called My Home Green Pages as a way to reach green consumers. Thus far, over 7,000 businesses are part of the database.

"The whole goal of the directory is to connect Hoosiers with green businesses and to connect businesses with each other to promote green business in Indiana," Lucas says.

The Web site is free for consumers and green businesses to use and traffic is increasing every month.

"In these economic times, everybody is struggling, small business owners in particular," she notes.

This past January, Lucas also launched the Green Business Network, a program offering weekly meetings for business owners to share information, advice and even customers. Thus far, about 20 businesses are signed up for the Green Business Network, and the first of 52 meetings began in February.

After a year and a half of time, energy and money, her business ventures have yet to pay off monetarily.

"I'm doing, right now, everything I can," Lucas says with a laugh, "And all of this, it has been a pure investment, so far."

### **Living green**

Still, Lucas says she feels good about her contributions and feels blessed to be able to dedicate her time to the green field. At times, her only discouragement comes from the lack of education people receive on how to make the world a greener place. She believes it is a huge part of any initiative to educate people and if they are given the information, they will begin to participate in eco-friendly habits.

"You might think your little action, maybe you use biodegradable packaging or detergents, is inconsequential and meaningless, but if a lot of people do that and they maybe share the car, don't go to places they don't need to go, fly less, whatever," Lucas says, "it actually adds up."

In her personal life, she and her family recycle, and use biodegradable detergents and compact, energy-efficient light bulbs. Lucas also has Hoosier Organic Connection deliver organic produce right to her doorstep. She notes in comparing organic to organic, it's pretty much the same price and it's nice to know there are no extra chemicals ending up on her plate. Most importantly, she tries to buy less from the start.

"I think the green way is the future way of everything," Lucas says. "The green way is the way of frugality and wise use of resources."