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Duluth cafe's new parking lot paved with recycled plastic

Thousands of old tires and plastic bottles will get a new lease on life in At Sara's Table/Chester Creek Cafe's new parking lot.

By: [Peter Passi](#), Duluth News Tribune

Thousands of old tires and plastic bottles will get a new lease on life in At Sara's Table/Chester Creek Cafe's new parking lot.

The popular Duluth eatery is using a Minnesota-made paving product made from recycled plastic and rubber materials to create a parking surface. The new 3,750-square-foot lot should keep 1,875 tires and 56,250 plastic bottles out of the landfill.

Carla Blumberg, who co-owns the cafe with Barbara Neubert, estimated the project cost at about \$50,000. The lot increased the restaurant's parking capacity from 19 to 42 vehicles.

"They [the recycled plastic pavers] are a little more expensive, but they also go down faster because they're so light," she said, adding she values keeping materials out of the waste stream.

The pavers, manufactured by VAST Enterprises LLC of Minneapolis, go down without mortar or adhesives. Instead, they snap into a rubber and plastic backing system that's laid atop pea gravel.

The resulting surface is much more permeable than traditional paving systems, resulting in reduced storm-water runoff, according to VAST.

The paving system seemed a logical choice to Blumberg, who has been a strong advocate of reusing materials. Her cafe was formerly a grocery store, and she salvaged much of the lumber from old coolers in the building to trim out the restaurant. She said the cafe's tables and booths are largely built from recycled lumber taken from a Park Point home that was being torn down.

"I was partially motivated by not wanting to see materials go to waste, but I also like the way a lot of this old wood looks. It has a warm feeling to it," she said.

Nate Hooper, a sales representative for Brock White Co., supplied the materials used to construct Bloomberg's new parking lot. He said the system has been used for a few residential projects in the area, but he believes the Chester Creek Cafe lot is the first commercial application of the product in the Northland.

He expects the pavers to generate strong interest.

"In the last few years, green products have become much more popular," Hooper observed. "There's been a big push to keep materials out of the landfill, and people are paying more attention to the products they pick."

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