



Megan Lehtonen believes plumbers can help change the world. PHOTO BY JENNIFER HALE

MEGAN'S FAVORITE THINGS

- Water (fresh or salt, whatever I can get into)
- Family
- Opportunity

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Wastewater Warrior

Megan Lehtonen, president of GreenPlumbers USA, is helping reduce our nation's water and energy use by offering plumbers comprehensive training on everything from solar water heaters to natural wastewater treatment. The plumbers also learn how to conduct a detailed, 50-point water audit on homes and businesses. Adapted from a global program that began in Australia, GreenPlumbers USA has already trained thousands of plumbers in its first year. Plumbing companies that commit to training all their technicians and adhere to a code of ethics can become Licensed GreenPlumbers.

How does plumbing contribute to global climate change? How would efficient plumbing help reduce it?

Saving water and energy reduces the environmental impact of our society. We are learning more and more about the nexus of water and energy. For example, the transportation of water throughout California accounts for 19 percent of the state's electrical use. Saving water saves energy, and everybody benefits. Plumbers are the face-to-face end-solution providers for consumers across the country, and can show homeowners how efficient plumbing can have an enormous impact on our country's environmental footprint.

You call for a "complete culture change in the plumbing industry." What does that entail?

Top to bottom—manufacturers, wholesalers, contractors and plumbers—the entire industry needs to adapt to new technology and conservation procedures. For us, culture change means plumbers stepping up and taking the responsibility to become champions of conservation. America needs to save water, and the plumbing industry needs to be part of the solution.

Why is it important to reduce household water use?

Drinking water is a finite resource. The water we have is the water we are going to have. North and Central Americans use more than twice as much as people in other

countries. We can do better. You've heard it said that water is the new oil. We aren't talking about saving water as much as we are talking about not wasting water. Someday soon we will be saying, "Do you remember when we used to flush our toilets with drinking water?"

What do you love about this program?

It's really inspiring for us when a 50-year-old plumber gets excited about his trade all over again. You know that he will go out and be a representative for change. We have trained more than 3,000 plumbers in our first year, and we will train 50,000 to 60,000 more in the next few years. That volume has the potential to result in huge water and energy savings.

What's the first thing you would tell homeowners to change in their plumbing systems?

Eliminate water-wasting toilets. Most cities have rebates available to change out your toilet to a better-performing, more efficient model. It's simple and can save 11,800 gallons of water per home in a year. Approximately 100 million water-wasting toilets are still being used in this country today.



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