

# Rainwater catchment a growth field

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**E**nvironmental concerns, expensive rates for water, and challenges to the Atlanta region's water supply are driving growth in the rainwater catchment-systems business for a number of metro-area companies.

One of these is Atlanta-based **ECOVIE**. This three-employee firm engineers and installs systems designed to capture and hold rainwater for a variety of uses. ECOVIE specializes in custom design and installation of rainwater collection systems for outdoor and indoor use by residential homes and commercial businesses.

The firm is led by founder Bob Drew. By education both a chemical engineer and an MBA, Drew started the company in 2008 after a few years of experience that included running a water plant and managing large engineering projects in the U.S., Latin America and Europe.

Most of ECOVIE's current business involves installations in the residential market, according to Drew. With the downturn in large-volume new-home building in the metro area, much of the company's work is done with individual homeowners, along with the general contractors and/or architects they hire.

Generally speaking, the cost of an ECOVIE-designed system for a new, three-bedroom/two-bath home occupied by four people would run in the \$5,000 to \$10,000 range for an above-ground system and \$10,000 to \$20,000 for one below ground, depending upon variables such as use of the harvested rainwater ("It's highly advantageous to use it for indoor plumbing as well as outdoor irrigation," Drew said.) and the sophistication of the control system installed.

The benefits of installing a system as part of building a new home can be significant, according to Drew.

"A system financed as part of a mortgage

adds about \$50 in additional monthly to your mortgage costs," Drew said. For a home within the city limits of Atlanta, "The reduction in your water bill is at least double that, making it a cash-flow-positive proposition from the start."

And as far as environmental/sustainability benefits, "Catching storm water allows you to use it when it is not raining," Drew said. And in a built environment that consists more and more of hard surfaces, including streets and parking lots, "catching stormwater is a way to prevent runoff and flooding, slowing down erosion and helping replenish groundwater as the rain seeps down into the ground."

In the commercial sector, ECOVIE's highest-profile project to date began last May when the company teamed up with the **Atlanta Braves** to install a 1,500-gallon co-branded tank in Turner Field's Monument Grove to capture, use and manage water. Some 9,879 gallons, or around 6.5 tankfuls, were collected over

the course of the 2011 baseball season, according to Beth Marshall, the Braves director of public relations. The water was used to clean the entire Plaza area (just inside the main gates behind the outfield). ECOVIE and the Braves are currently looking at larger systems for Turner Field "that can really make an impact on their water bill," Drew said. In one proposal currently under consideration, "The idea is collect water that comes off the 50,000-square-foot upper-deck canopy, which could supply up to 1 million gallons per year."

Also in the commercial arena, the company has a number of proposals out to companies for projects that include harvesting and storing rainwater from parking structures and building rooftops, ultimately using it for things like grounds irrigation and cooling-tower makeup, according to Drew. And in the institutional market, ECOVIE has a project under way



**Drew**  
ECOVIE



**Harvesting rainwater:** This ECOVIE-Atlanta Braves 1,500-gallon tank at Turner Field collected more than 9,800 gallons of water during the 2011 season.

at the **Oliver House**, a senior-living facility in Decatur, in which rainwater will be collected from the 22,000-square-foot roof for use in irrigation and flushing toilets.

A private company, ECOVIE is still in its startup phase, according to Drew. It has enjoyed a 300 percent annual growth pace since its 2008 founding, he reports, and should generate around \$500,000 in sales this year. Employees include Drew, Operations Director Jason Ostby and a sales coordinator, with much of the project work subcontracted on an as-needed basis, "which gives us flexibility from the cash-flow standpoint, and makes sense to me as the way to build a new company in this market."

While the company has done a few out-of-state projects, "We really consider metro Atlanta as having the most opportunity for us," Drew said.

ECOVIE's main focus is on growing its business in the commercial sector, he notes, "where we can offer companies that want to pursue LEED certification for their buildings, or implement sustainability programs, with projects that meet their objectives."

Specific targets include restaurant and hotel chains, he adds, "and other sub-segments that could present some interesting opportunities for us."

There are several factors driving current and potential growth at ECOVIE and other firms in the rainwater catchment business.

"A lot of people would prefer to have cleaner water," said Jim Harrington, president and founder of **Rainwater Collection Solutions Inc.**, the Alpharetta-based manufacturer of the "The Original Rainwater Pillow," a storage container used in rainwater catchment systems.

"And rainwater is the cleanest water on Earth," he notes, especially compared to that from municipal water systems, "which have many contaminants that [the water systems] cannot remove at the rate they need to."

Water shortages and restrictions, and the tri-state water wars surrounding use of water from Lake Lanier are also helping drive growth in this industry, according to Randy Kauk, head of Cumming-based **RainHarvest Systems**, which sells rainwater catchment system components and equipment.

"The challenge is creating awareness about how rainwater collection systems can be effective tools in addressing water shortages," Kauk said, "as well as recharging groundwater supplies and combating erosion."

"Rainwater collection systems are ubiquitous worldwide, with the exception of the U.S.," Kauk said.

Some 30 percent to 50 percent of European homes have these systems, he said, compared with only 10 percent state-side, "so the potential for growth is there."