

# CASE STUDY: CAFÉ AND SHOP

**ReThink  
Disposable**  
STOP WASTE BEFORE IT STARTS

## BUSINESS PROFILE

**Name:** The Sacred Wheel  
**Business type:** Café and cheese shop  
**Location:** Oakland, CA  
**On-site dining:** 23 seats  
**Take Out:** Yes  
**Ware washing:** Done by hand by staff

**Sacred Wheel** is a popular café and cheese shop in the Temescal neighborhood of Oakland. In addition to their well-stocked cheese case, Sacred Wheel offers made-to-order soups, sandwiches, salads, sides, specials and drinks. Sacred Wheel typically serves 70-100 customers per day. Both indoor and outdoor seating are available to customers.

**Jena Davidson, Co-owner:** *“As our business grew, so did the amount of trash. We were using compostable products, which it turns out are not composted in Oakland and were instead going to the landfill.”*

## Packaging Practices prior to ReThink Disposable:

- ➔ All food and beverages were served on disposable food service ware
- ➔ Customers were always given disposable utensils and napkins when ordering food to go without being asked if they needed them
- ➔ Customers were always given a lid and straw for drinks
- ➔ Disposable tasting spoons were used for samples



Jena, the co-owner of Sacred Wheel, had switched to compostable disposable packaging, because she thought this was the best thing to do for the environment. However, she found out that the compostable plastics Sacred Wheel was using to serve food and beverages couldn't be composted in Oakland and were instead being sent to the landfill. Jena reconsidered and realized that real dishes were the best option for Sacred Wheel and are also more eco-friendly.

## Recommendations implemented:

- ➔ Replace disposable tasting spoons, cups, bowls, cutlery and condiment cups with reusable dishware for on-site dining
- ➔ Offer napkins in a self-serve dispenser
- ➔ Make straws available upon request only
- ➔ Ask before giving customers disposable items like utensil and napkins for to-go orders

Jena and her staff implemented all of the **ReThink Disposable** recommendations with great success! Working together, the Sacred Wheel team was able to split up the dish washing responsibilities without adding any extra staff time. This kept costs low and allowed Sacred Wheel to recover the full savings from reduced disposable purchases. In addition to these savings, Sacred Wheel was able to reduce waste hauling costs. Customers love the changes and were glad to see Sacred Wheel being proactive about waste reduction.



**Jena Davidson, Co-owner:** *“By switching from expensive recyclable and compostable packaging to real dishes, I was able to save money and do the best thing for the environment. And right away customers started commenting on how happy they are with the changes!”*

**WINNER**  
**STOPWASTE**  
**BUSINESS EFFICIENCY**  
**AWARD**  
for Waste Reduction  
Excellence by a  
Restaurant

## Results:

Recommendation	Products Replaced or Minimized	% Disposable Reduction	Payback Period	Annual Savings (after payback period)	Annual Waste Reduction
Offer napkins in a self-serve dispenser	Paper napkin	16%	2.6 months	\$17	21 lbs.
Offer straws upon request only	Compostable plastic straw	100%	0 days	\$132	15 lbs.
Replace disposable tasting spoons with reusable spoons	Plastic spoon	100%	9 days	\$73	12 lbs.
Replace disposable cups with reusable cups	Compostable plastic and paper cups	86%	27 days	\$644	186 lbs.
Replace disposable bowls with reusable bowls	Compostable bowls	20%	3.2 months	\$130	211 lbs.
Replace disposable cutlery with reusable cutlery	Compostable plastic cutlery	64%	6 days	\$676	100 lbs.
Replace disposable condiment cups with reusable condiment cups	Compostable and plastic condiment cups	57%	27 days	\$266	57 lbs.
Ask before giving out disposable items	Utensils, napkins and lids	N/A	0 days	\$714	N/A

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,652</b>	<b>602 lbs.</b>
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**+ \$1,116 savings in annual waste hauling costs = \$3,768 total annual savings**

### THE BOTTOM LINE:

- **\$3,768 total annual savings**
- **602 pounds of waste reduced annually**
- **No additional labor required**
- **Improved presentation**
- **Satisfied customers**
- **Won an award!**

**ReThink Disposable** is a project of Clean Water Fund in coordination with City of Cupertino Department of Public Works, City of Oakland Department of Public Works, City of Sunnyvale Environmental Services Department, County of San Mateo Department of Public Works, San Francisco Department of the Environment, San Jose Department of Environmental Services, South San Francisco Department of Public Works, and StopWaste (Alameda County).

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