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## **Business seeks award for innovation**

*Idea for recycling carpet submitted for state competition*

By Cynthia M. Ellis

WOOD RIVER - A local business is hoping to hook the public with an innovative idea in recycling.

NICA Corp., 144 Ferguson Ave., is competing as a finalist Tuesday in the fourth annual Innovate Illinois competition, vying against 11 other companies for a chance to win \$40,000.

"We're pretty excited," said Chris Drake, co-owner of the commercial floor covering installation company. "We think we've got a great idea, and there is nothing out there like it."

Chris Drake and his brother, Bryan Drake, are the designers of Fiber-LOOP, which is an original idea for recycling carpet. The brothers believe they've found an innovative and cost-effective method for salvaging a product that seldom is recycled.

Chris Drake said only 1 percent of the carpet taken off America's floors is recycled. He said that he and his brother came up with the idea because their predominant clients - the federal government - are pushing for flooring and carpeting to be recycled.

"We've designed a container that we think will make it easier to recycle carpet," Drake said.

He said small amounts of carpeting generally are not recycled because of the costs involved. The "recycle sleeve" would make it easier to recycle and ship scraps, he said.

The sleeves are placed in 48-inch-by-40-inch container to help bring down the shipping cost. Each container will hold 200 yards of carpet, and a tractor-trailer will be able to hold 52 containers before it is taken to one of two recycling facilities, one of which is Covanta Energy.

Covanta Energy recycles carpet and makes energy from the waste. The average facility generates 550 kilowatt-hours per ton, equal to one barrel of oil and one-quarter-ton of coal.

Covanta operates more than 20 sites across the country.

Drake said if the innovation wins, the money would be used to help fund partnerships nationwide, so that more people could recycle. He said the great thing about the container is that it can be taken to any location where carpet is removed.

The brothers opened their carpeting business five years ago. Their father, Bob Drake, is the former owner of River City Service Center, 131 E. Ferguson Ave.

Chris Drake said they also have an office located in Washington, D.C., which is where their father now lives. He said that Wade Rives also is instrumental in the business.

Regional finalists were selected based on their business models, innovation and potential uses of an Innovate Illinois award. The finalists also were asked to prepare and submit a Business Innovation Plan.

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity and the Chicagoland Entrepreneurial Center, a nonprofit affiliate of the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, administer the competition. The

finals will take place between 2:30 and 4:30 p.m. Tuesday at the University of Chicago's Gleacher Center.

More than 130 companies across the state applied to the program. The competition highlights the products, processes or services offered by each business.

Awards will be given to the most innovative high-growth companies in five of the most economically productive industries - manufacturing, agriculture, technology, environmental, and business or health services - based on the strength of their business and the potential impact of their innovation. Additional awards will be given to the top minority-owned business and women-owned business in those industries.

Finalists are divided into two categories: early stage, a company with an idea for an innovative product, service or process; and later stage, a company that recently implemented an innovative product, service or process. NICA is a later stage company.

"With such a push for green innovations, we think we've got a real shot and think this product will really work," Chris Drake said.

Visit [www.innovateillinois.org](http://www.innovateillinois.org) to learn more.

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