

First anniversary for Eden Mills Going Carbon Neutral

By Rebecca Ring

The Eden Mills Community Hall was packed earlier this month as the village celebrated its first year of Going Carbon Neutral with presentations by organizers, participants and author Chris Turner, followed by a potluck dinner at the Community Hall. Tim Laing emceed the event and Barry Randall, Rob Kerr and Jude Vadala provided live music. All stood and sang the Carbon Neutral Anthem, led by a video presentation featuring the Carbon Neutral Choir. The anthem is a catchy little ditty, highlighting tips for reducing carbon footprints.

Charles Simon spoke about the status of the Household Survey initiated last year, conducted by University of Guelph students. It measures each participant's carbon footprint made by transportation, travel, and energy used in the home. Of all the people contacted, seventy per cent agreed to participate. The survey showed that Eden Mills is above the national average for CO² emissions, mainly due to transportation. This year's survey began early this month with students asking for suggestions on how to improve the survey and increase participation. The main survey will be sent out in early December, with an open house in January, follow up on missing information in February, and the final report in late March.

Andrew Gordon and Kit Bresnahan reported on carbon sequestration. University of Guelph students are currently investigating the forests and soils in the village to determine their sequestering abilities and calculate the extent to which these forests absorb CO². Findings will help determine the nature and extent of new plantations and whether forest management can bolster the rate of sequestration. Bresnahan said that over 70 families participated in the tree planting on Earth Day last April. The event resulted in 2256 trees of native species in the ground. He invited anyone interested in ordering trees to contact him.

Libby Little updated the crowd on school activities. Green Legacy is expanding its school program and over 5000 students will participate, as well as the Vanier Centre for Women, who will grow trees in a nursery.

Rockwood Centennial Public School is designated as an "Eco-school" this year, with Tracey Darling as the eco-teacher. The less-litter-lunches waste reduction campaign was such a huge success that it is now a mandatory board-wide program. The school will be home to one of the nine green classrooms approved by the Upper Grand District School Board. It will build a straw bale portable on site, which will be a low carbon footprint classroom.

Glenn Little spoke about the solar panel project for the village. Financing has been arranged for a 10 kW array. Guelph/Eramosa Township has agreed in principle to host the panels in the local park. A zoning change will be required. The projects target date is next spring.

Louisa McCarly spoke about the importance of buying local when shopping for food or other items. She provided a local food directory for fresh produce, wine and meat. It is listed at www.goingcarbonneutral.com.

Shelagh Quaile updated the crowd on the Eden Mills Carbon Neutral Youth Group. Its purpose is to provide a place for high school kids to have fun and socialize while discussing environmental issues and taking action. During its first year, the group

organized the Earth Day tree planting and workshops in Eden Mills. They went winter camping in Snow Quinzes, spent a weekend up north canoeing, kayaking, cooking and hiking, went to the Royal Ontario Museum, and played games which teach initiative and problem solving.

Bresnahan summarized the environmental workshops that have taken place so far: Geo Thermal, Electrical and Home Energy Conservation. These are open to the public.

Richard Lay presented Enermodal Engineering Ltd.'s Community Hall energy audit, with the focus on energy use and possible reduction. It was conducted over last spring and summer. They inspected the mechanical system and building envelope, performed blower tests to measure leakiness, and created an energy simulation model for various building functions. He then reviewed possible modifications and how much each would reduce annual energy use.

Web master Steve Wynen spoke about the web site at www.goingcarbonneutral.com. There were 5355 visits over the last year, with over 75% of those being new visits. New to the site is the downloadable handbook, "Empowering Your Home: An Introduction to Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency." Linda Sword elaborated on the handbook, which provides information on energy, electricity, tips for efficiency, wind, earth and solar energy, tankless water heaters, radiant heating, insulation and building materials, passive solar design, costs, resources and government incentives. Hardcopy booklets are available.

The guest speaker was author Chris Turner. He gave a presentation based on his book, "The Geography of Hope," which showcases practical environmental solutions in place around the world. He began by applauding Eden Mills for being ahead of most by not only agreeing on the issues, but by taking action. He provided quotes from some of the greatest thinkers on the environment, economy and human nature. He defined this time as the anthropocene era, meaning that human activity is changing the nature of the planet's climate; "Some characteristics created by us differentiate this from any other cycle." He commended Eden Mills on recognizing the need for a fundamental shift, as "business as usual is no longer valid." He identified tools that will help "make the shift and adapt to the new era." Hope is the first tool. He quoted Rebecca Solnit as saying, "Hope is an axe you break down doors with in an emergency."

Turner identified different cities and towns throughout the world that demonstrate, "Humanity already possesses the know-how to solve the climate problem," according to Princeton Professors Stephen Pacala and Robert Socolow. For example, Freyberg, Germany, built 58 town homes of standard size and cost that provide more energy than they consume every year. Each house is its own power plant. He spoke about transportation and how in Singapore, they are using hydrogen fuel cell vehicles en masse. After providing numerous example of technology in use, new ones and old ones revived, he spoke about how to get people to embrace sustainable living. In one community, where many people had apple orchards, project initiators bought a juice press and offered to press apples for free. They targeted the most conservative members, who stayed to hear the presentation to be polite. They were swayed and in turn, so was the entire community.

He finished by encouraging Eden Mills to "brand" itself and contribute to an "environmental mass marketing system. Techniques that sell us Nike can sell us ideas, and ways to live and do things differently."