

# REAL

*REAL people taking REAL action to protect our environment*

## ANNUAL REPORT

Feb 1, 2011 - Jan 31, 2012

## Rideau Environmental Action League (REAL)

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our lengthy list of 2011 accomplishment shows REAL's diverse mix of environmental interests, from energy to climate change to food to well water to reducing waste. That mix isn't an accident. In 1989 a group of concerned citizens set out to provide other citizens the opportunities to have a positive environmental impact locally. With the environment affecting so many aspects of our lives, the group couldn't be limited to one issue.

But this diversity is also a sign that people are what make up REAL – people with different backgrounds, skills, approaches, and time constraints. Some of those people have a particular area where they want to make a REAL difference, others will tackle any project where they are needed. It is sometimes a wonder that we proceed as a cohesive unit, as a well-respected, stable organization on firm financial footing. REAL has contributed to the economic activity of our region and directly engaged 6,500 people through our activities. We are very appreciative of our supportive members, dedicated volunteers, skilled staff, thoughtful donors, and committed board. REAL needs all of these people to move forward and accomplish our goals.

This year we are particularly proud of our community garden, the municipal support we have received for REAL and the Take it Back Recyclopeda, and the continued growth and success of the REAL Deal Reuse Store. Other highlights include the Regional Contact coverage, fence building workshops, and the junk art at the REAL Deal. Ongoing projects like Well Aware, home energy audits and Pitch In are well-entrenched and are part of our public identity. But there are many more activities that define us as an organization.

Our challenges for the future continue to be engaging even more people in our work, choosing projects that are meaningful and achievable, and organizing fund-raisers that are effective but leave time for what we do best. Your perspective via comment or participation is always welcome.

Barb Hicks, President

### 2011 Board of Directors

Barbara Hicks	<i>President</i>
Peter Au	<i>Past President</i>
Larry Manson	<i>Vice President</i>
Karen Schecter	<i>Secretary-Treasurer</i>
Cathryn Davidson	
Scott Lumsden	
Betty Davis	
Elva Corless	<i>Director Emerita</i>
Susan Brandum	<i>Environmental Projects Manager</i>
	<i>Executive Director REAL Deal</i>
Ken Graham	<i>Town of Smiths Falls Liaison</i>

### REAL Staff



**Alan  
Leonard**

**Tracy  
Thomson**

**Susan  
Brandum**

**Don  
Harvey**

**Angela  
Gulley-Northfield**

# 2011 Highlights

## ☆ COMMUNITY GARDEN

The REAL Community Garden on the REAL Deal site was expanded to eight raised wood-framed plots, which were tended by eight different community groups or individuals. Construction and signage were made possible with a grant from the Walmart Evergreen Foundation. Training and orientation and vegetable cooking sessions rounded out the participants' experience.



## ☆ REAL ART

A generous contribution from a donor made it possible to commission a collection of five junk art panels by local artist Val Hudson, which now graces the REAL Deal exterior, adding thought provoking visual interest to our wall and to our community.

## ☆ REAL DEAL DEVELOPMENT

The REAL Deal Reuse Store continues to grow thanks to new manager, Tracy Thomson, store assistant Don Harvey and a dedicated crew of volunteers. Regular promotions, including our first art sale, a repurposing workshop, reorganization within the store, the addition of a free store shed and investment in a storage trailer contributed to this success. Other highlights include an inconvenient flood in March and electrical problems in January.



## ☆ ecoENERGY

Thanks in part to the efforts of Green Communities Canada and its members, the cancelled federal ecoENERGY for homes grant program was given a reprieve, allowing another 50 homeowners to take advantage of our home energy audit service. Most were already on a tight schedule to get all the work done by the end of the program in March 2012, when the program was closed early to new registrants on January 29.

## OTHER 2011 Events

### CTV REGIONAL CONTACT



REAL was thrilled to be chosen as the subject for a CTV Regional Contact story which aired November 6th. The television spot drew many favourable comments from viewers, and promoted

the store to a much wider audience than we had reached before.

### WATER TREATMENT PLANT TOUR

A tour of the new, state-of-the-art Smiths Falls Water Treatment plant was organized in honour of World Water Day.

### RAIN

The RAIN program encourages Smiths Falls residents to pay attention to their own properties and to what they may be allowing to



go into the drains and the Rideau River. Workshops on "Making your Own Dog Waste Digester" and tree planting were held. REAL, Canada World Youth and some youth club members cooperated on the Yellow Fish Road program, painting yellow fish on sewer grates and talking to Merrick Street residents.

## FENCE BUILDING

A series of three heritage cedar rail fence building workshops were enthusiastically attended by area residents thanks to the expertise of Eugene Fytche and Scott Dobson. Three styles of fence now surround the REAL community garden.



## RIDEAU VOLUNTEERS

The successful two year Rideau Volunteers program, supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, concluded. Lynn Preston, our part-time volunteer Coordinator, doubled the volunteer bases of REAL and the Rideau Canal Museum, organized several training sessions and social events, and lay the groundwork for an ongoing volunteer program.



## TAKE IT BACK

Support was solicited and received from several area municipalities to continue to research and post entries to the online Take it Back Recyclopedia. This directory lists area retailers and organizations that accept materials back for reuse or recycling.

## WELL AWARE

An unsolicited donation of \$2500 from the RBC Foundation was put towards Well Aware Outreach, in particular, a session at Lombardy Hall on "Protecting your Well and Our Common Groundwater" for residents adjacent to solar farms.

# Ongoing Projects

**Pitch In Smiths Falls.** The annual litter cleanup attracted 1,118 residents to clean up parks, roadsides and other public areas in our community.

**Evergreen Avenue.** This dedicated committee maintains the pathway, benches, granite stone markers and vegetation that make up this memorial walkway in Victoria Park.

**Environment Centre.** We await final results of Parks Canada's studies on the least bittern's swale breeding area and the small area of soil contamination at the back of the building, but continue to look for the means to create a business plan and hire staff to coordinate the development of all potential features.



**Well Aware.** 2011 was the 10<sup>th</sup> season of the Well Aware program, which included 31 Guided Self-Assessment visits and several public presentations on wells and their groundwater implications.

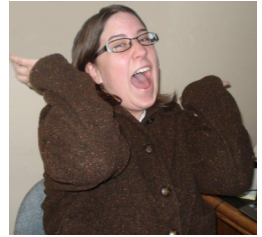
**Community Events.** REAL participated in community events such as the library's Trivia Challenge, the Legion's remembrance day observances, the Lanark County Plowing Match display, staffing the Salvation Army Christmas kettle, the Smiths Falls Volunteer Fair and others.

**Networking and Training.** REAL keeps informed and participates in local issues, this year through the Lake Links Conference, the Rideau River Landscape Strategy talks, the downtown Smiths Falls redesign, active transportation and others. REAL leaders have received training on topics such as board governance, charitable tax return preparation, personal fundraising, social enterprises and we have organized accessibility training for key volunteers and staff.

**Community Fundraising.** We enjoyed generous community support for our fundraising efforts: a bottle drive at The Beer Store (\$500), Environment Week at Andress' Your Independent Grocer (\$1700), and the annual Prelude to Christmas Concert (\$4,000) with the Central Band of the Canadian Forces.



**Municipal Relations.** Ongoing board efforts to establishing relationships with area municipalities have resulted in funding support from Montague, Drummond-North Elmsley and Smiths Falls, with additional municipal support specifically for the Take it Back Program from Perth, North Grenville and Mississippi Mills.



**Mentoring.** We benefitted from the youth contributions through employment and volunteer programs: Leah Lloyd, YMCA Youth Eco Intern; Mel Ley, Katimavik; Marla McKenna, Summer Jobs Canada; Fredy Reyes and Amy Blaney, Canada World Youth, and hopefully have contributed to their knowledge of environmental issues.



**Communication.** REAL communicates details of REAL events, environmental issues, and other activities through our notices, REAL Deal Store, newsletter, website and news releases.

**Solar Energy.** Our solar energy committee continued to research and explore ways REAL could, alone or with others, produce solar energy to feed back into the grid and earn revenue for REAL.



Major Funders, Donors & Partners



## Plans for 2012 and Beyond

- ◆ Continue to develop the REAL Deal, particularly in the area of renovation materials.



- ◆ Explore other possible social enterprise ventures.
- ◆ Search for ways to make the Rain Water Garden at the Smiths Falls Public Library a reality.
- ◆ Work towards a fully operational, fully funded and well-used Environment Centre.
- ◆ Offer home energy audits and services so people can reduce their carbon footprint, regardless of rebate availability.
- ◆ Offer limited income household energy efficiency improvement programs.

- ◆ Explore new ways to engage and educate the public through workshops and other educational means.
- ◆ Improve the energy efficiency and flood avoidance measures at REAL Deal.
- ◆ Expand on the fundraising opportunities of the Central Band concert.
- ◆ Continue to develop and review our policies relating to Health and Safety, workplace safety, privacy and non-profit management issues.
- ◆ Fully develop the Take it Back online directory.
- ◆ Offer a Well Aware program that emphasizes more group education sessions over home visits.