

REAL

REAL people taking REAL action to protect our environment

ANNUAL REPORT
Feb 1, 2012 - Jan 31, 2013

Rideau Environmental Action League (REAL)

YEAR IN REVIEW

A look back at 2012 shows REAL is continuing our local environmental action. Waste reduction initiatives, such as the REAL Deal Reuse store, are evolving, the Community Garden is attracting interest, and longstanding programs like Pitch In, Evergreen Avenue and eco-friendly workshops continue. Educating rural residents about their wells goes on, as does teaching Smiths Falls residents to reduce pollution reaching the Rideau River via rain and snowmelt. REAL continues to promote energy conservation. And the Board ensures we have the framework to allow our projects to continue: by overseeing our finances, volunteers, regulatory requirements, communications and general operations.

But are these local actions enough? When REAL began in 1989, it seemed environmental solutions were coming, and thinking globally and acting locally would move things along. But world-wide problems like climate change have accelerated and new problems have become evident. Canadian environmental legislation that was in place was severely compromised by the passage of omnibus bills C-38 and C-45, and several past "battles" will need to be won again. It is not a hopeless situation, but to turn things around will take the involvement of a lot more people doing things beyond our own backyards. We all need to vote, pay attention to what is going on and speak out if we don't approve of situations in the province, Canada and internationally.

But individuals need to show their commitment to making positive changes, too. REAL can encourage people to make sound "local" choices like improving their home energy efficiency, buying more local food, conserving water, and shopping to avoid excess packaging. Individuals can set an example, and talk to their family, friends and co-workers so they understand and can make healthy choices too. As an organization, REAL does this too: ex-

plaining and demonstrating to our neighbours in the Lanark, Leeds and Grenville region what they can do to protect our natural systems. It's not the whole solution, but it's an important part.

The Year Ahead: A major challenge for REAL in the coming year will be funding. Competition for funding is becoming more intense, and contributing municipalities are feeling the pinch. We will need to make the REAL Deal more profitable, do more personal fundraising, continue to investigate possible social enterprises as revenue streams, and choose a new fundraiser. Through these activities we need to reserve sufficient human resources to continue most of the environmental projects mentioned here. In 2013, look for more activity on the solar farm baseline water sampling front, a revamped website, more features for our Environment Centre, and a celebration of the fifth anniversary of the REAL Deal on William Street.

Your input and participation are always welcome.

Barb Hicks, President



2012 Activities

☆ COMMUNITY GARDEN GROWING STRONG



In this third year of the REAL Community Garden, all eight raised garden plots were rented by individuals or groups. Due to a prolonged drought, yields were not great, but participants thought the experience was still worthwhile. A ninth “Stone Soup Sharing Plot” was built and planted, and the public are welcome to take produce from this plot. Educational events included spring instruction on growing tomatoes, instruction on late season planting, and a session on cooking from the garden, held at the Smiths Falls Community Health Centre.

☆ REAL DEAL ATTRACTS A LOYAL FOLLOWING

Our reuse store continues to develop and attract a loyal following of donors and customers. Many changes to the physical layout of the store and yard have improved our display options and made the cash area more effective and attractive. Special promotions included a repeat of the Second Chance Art Bazaar in March, participation in the May antique show and sale at the Community Centre, a “Big Summer Sale”, and selling an incredible amount of Christmas stock. Make a Deal Fridays and the monthly Silent Auctions continue to be popular features. We continue to look for additional ways to help residents reduce their household waste. Some major electrical difficulties were rectified in August, an earth berm was created to reduce the possibility of flooding in the building, the front of our building had a facelift, and a new REAL sign was mounted. The store operates with two paid staff and many dedicated volunteers, with the whole operation supervised by an Executive Director, Sue Brandum.



☆ FUNDRAISERS RAISE REAL'S PROFILE



Our three fundraisers not only generate much needed funds for REAL's work, but increase our profile in the community. The “Donate a Toonie” campaign at Andress' Independent Grocer coincided with Environment Week and raised \$1244. A bottle drive at The Beer Store, Smiths Falls, one August weekend raised \$450. And our popular “Prelude to Christmas” concert with the Central Band of the Canadian Forces raised \$4,500. REAL is now registered with 1% for the Planet, an organization that enlists businesses to donate 1% of their profits to environmental causes. We were also fortunate to receive a major donation from a local couple who are long-time REAL supporters.

☆ TRAINING AND NETWORKING

REAL leaders have received training on succession planning, changes to the Ontario Non-Profit Act, personal fundraising, social media and the creation of social enterprises. We took an interest in the Black Out Speak Out campaign, and the proposed budget cuts to the Rideau Canal, and networked with other Green Communities to improve our practices and develop joint programs. We and other outlets participated in a pilot rain barrel incentive program with the Town of Smiths Falls. REAL participated in the annual Trivia Challenge, the home show in Smiths Falls, the Merrickville Go Green EcoFair, the Smiths Falls Volunteer Fair, the North Grenville Sustainability Fair and the Lake Links conference.



☆ **PILOT RAIN PROGRAM WRAPS UP**

The RAIN program encouraged residents to reduce storm sewer source pollution entering the Rideau River, using workshops to get the key concepts across. In March, residents were offered instruction on how to put their driveways on a low salt diet, and in April, dog owners were shown how to make a pet waste digester and protect their pets from road salt. On April 28, a dedicated group learned and helped build a demonstration rainwater garden on the REAL site.

☆ **BASELINE WATER SAMPLING NEAR SOLAR FARMS**

REAL has entered into a new venture, which evolved from the successful Well Aware program and local expertise of Susan Brandum and Well Aware Guide, Angela Northfield. REAL has been contracted both through Recurrent Energy and the Township of Drummond North Elmsley to undertake the baseline well water sampling for homeowners adjacent to solar farms. Residents will benefit from the knowledge they gain about water supplies and their own wells, and will be prepared in the unlikely event their wells are affected by the solar installations.

☆ **PEOPLE POWER**

Our Volunteers: We are fortunate to have a dedicated volunteer base, as well as many others who contributed their enthusiasm and gained valuable experience in the process: Jamie Arbo in the office, Eric Sirvante on cash, Canada Worth Youth participants Kirah Corfe and Odilia Pineda, summer student Emma Gunn, secondary school student Alyssa Brownridge, as well as many others.



Our Board: REAL's activities are overseen by a volunteer board: Barb Hicks (President), Larry Manson (Vice-President), Peter Au (Past President), Karen Schechter (Secretary-Treasurer), Scott Lumsden and Donna McKenna. We have one vacancy available for a dedicated individual who shares our interest in environmental issues. Ken Graham, Smiths Falls Town Council Liaison, faithfully attends our monthly meetings as well.

Our Staff: REAL operates with five skilled part-time staff. Susan Brandum is our Environmental Projects Manager and Executive Director of the REAL Deal, as well as a volunteer for several projects. Tracy Thomson is our REAL Deal Store Manager, assisted by Don Harvey. Angela Northfield, Well Aware Guide, and Alan Leonard, Energy Auditor, complete the team. We are pleased that our non-profit is able to provide employment in our community.



Other 2012 Achievements

Pitch In Smiths Falls. Another successful campaign had Smiths Falls residents cleaning up litter across town, and volunteers doing a cleanup of our own site.

More about Meat. This February event was organized with Slow Food Lanark County. Seventy people enjoyed instruction from Chef Tribata and enjoyed a pot luck dinner.

Home Energy. Energy audits were offered to show how a home or small commercial building could save energy, despite the end of the ecoEnergy grants in 2013.

Evergreen Avenue. Five granite stones were placed along the Victoria Park Pathway, including one honouring Elva Corless and one marking REAL's 20th anniversary.

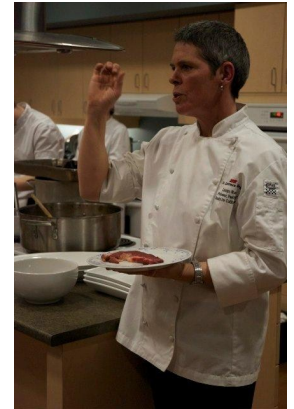
Rideau Mississippi Take it Back (TIB). Our directory of area organizations that accept materials for recycling, supported by four municipalities, was updated and launched.

REAL Recognized. Green Communities Canada presented awards to Peter Au for Environmental Lifetime Achievement and Barb Hicks for Outstanding Board Member.

Saving on Energy. REAL has been promoting the Ontario Power Authority Energy Home Assistance program, which provides free home energy upgrades.

Communication. REAL produced five newsletters, operated our website, maintained three Facebook pages, and used local newspapers and radio to promote REAL.

Environment Centre. We investigated ways to make this a one stop centre for information on eco-friendly living, and negotiated with Parks Canada, which owns the property .



Planning for the Future

As a non-profit, charitable, volunteer-run organization, a significant part of our revenue comes as contributions from our community. We gratefully accept financial donations of any size from individuals, groups and businesses to support our ongoing environmental work. Every dollar counts, and is eligible for a charitable receipt. We encourage people to consider the environmental future of our community. If you feel the quality of our natural systems is important to your grandchildren and future residents, please remember REAL in your estate planning. The environment of Lanark, Leeds and Grenville needs your support now and into the future.



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