

FEBRUARY 2008

Clarke Building “A Go”!

We are thrilled to report that after much consultation and nail biting REAL now has the Clarke Building on William Street for its office space and the operation of the REAL Deal. The Town of Smith Falls, and Parks Canada, who owns the land, have made this former Public Works building available to us on a long-term basis.

Consultations have been underway since last spring. The last remaining “show stopper” was a damaged wooden ceiling beam which we now know can be repaired at reasonable cost. And the public works operations formerly located there have now been moved to a facility on Air Care Drive. Immediate steps will be taken to repair the beam, have the interior brought up to Fire Code, and clean and paint the front area where our office space will be. The Fire Code changes will be financed by a \$4,000 grant from Valley Heartland.

Other renovations will take more time and fundraising - our goal is just to get the building in a usable state quickly so we can move in. A functioning REAL Deal Store is still many months away, but is becoming closer to reality. We will be soliciting donations of labour, paint, expertise and money to do this as quickly and cheaply as possible. Please consider helping in any way you can to make a functioning REAL Deal Store and Environment Centre a reality. But please, no donations of household goods yet - it will only slow us down!

Renewable Energy for the Home

Canadians are increasingly concerned about climate change and the high cost of energy. Conservation of energy in the home is an important first step in reducing your impact on the environment, but is there more you can do? Are renewable energy sources affordable and practical options for your home?



The Rideau Canal Museum and REAL are co-hosting a presentation “Homes, the Environment and Renewable Energy” at 7 p.m. Thursday, February 21 at the Rideau Canal

Museum, 34 Beckwith St. Smiths Falls.

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Chris Weissflog, the presenter, is an environmentalist with experience in construction and installing renewable energy systems. Weissflog will explain how people are currently using energies in their homes, what impact such use is having on the environment, and which renewable energies are currently available to help them reduce their carbon footprint. He will provide an overview of the more commonly available renewable energies and how homeowners can compare them to determine the most appropriate and cost-effective solution for them.

The presentation will include an opportunity to ask questions and will be followed by a brief meeting of REAL's Climate Change Action Team (CCAT).

The CCAT recently co-sponsored with the Rideau Canal Museum Jeff Kohl's presentation "Adapting your Household to Climate Change". Also in this series is a presentation on "Species at Risk" by Heather Lunn of the Eastern Ontario Model Forest scheduled for March 4, also at the museum.

Species at Risk

a presentation by Heather Lunn
of the Eastern Ontario Model Forest

**Tuesday, March,4 at 7 p.m.
Rideau Canal Museum, Smiths Falls**

There are 28 plant and wildlife species at risk in Eastern Ontario. Come hear what can be done!



Black Ratsnake. Photo by Simon Lunn.

Presented in partnership by the
Rideau Canal Museum and REAL.



Well Aware Guide Joins Source Water Protection Committee

Patricia Larkin, one of our two Certified Water Guides for the Well Aware Program, has been appointed to the newly formed Mississippi-Rideau Source Protection Committee (SPC).

The first official meeting of the SPC took place January 10. The 15-member SPC represents the major municipal, business and interest group sectors in the area of the Mississippi and Rideau valley watersheds. They are charged with guiding and supporting the source protection planning process over the next five years.

The formation of the local Mississippi-Rideau Source Protection Committee is a result of the *Clean Water Act* (CWA) which was passed by the Ontario Legislature in December, 2006 in response to the Walkerton tragedy of 2000. The province is divided into 19 Source Protection Regions, of which the Mississippi-Rideau is one.

Patricia applied to be a representative on the committee in the "other Interests" category, and was selected to represent non-governmental organizations in the area. Patricia has links with many organizations, among them the Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists, the Mississippi Mills Residents Association, the Almonte, Pakenham and Carleton Place Family of School Councils, and of course, REAL. As well, she served several years on the RVCA's Board of Directors.

REAL was pleased to provide an endorsement letter to support her application, as we felt the Well Aware Program and the Source Water Protection Committee complement each other so well – the former working with landowners on private wells and the latter focussed on municipal water supply.

Your Household and Climate Change

by Ron Toop

The evening of January 10, the Climate Change Action Committee (CCAT) and the Rideau Canal Museum hosted a very successful presentation by Jeff Kohl, an animator with the Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition, on "Preparing Your Household for Climate Change". Close to 50 people from the area attended, including representatives from Smiths Falls Council and the two local newspapers. Grounding his presentation in a PowerPoint Presentation and enlivening it with anecdotes from his personal experience, Jeff challenged the audience to rethink their household energy needs and establish closer links to the farming community for their family's food.

Jeff began with a quick overview of the likelihood of catastrophic climatic events happening sooner rather than later with the convergence of declining energy supplies and rapid changes in the world's climate with the fragility of our infrastructure. To prepare for these events, Jeff invited his audience to reduce their use of energy and develop a closer relationship with local farmers.

Do you remember, Jeff asked, how aware you became of your energy needs during the 1998 Ice Storm? Now, you need to take the adjustments you made then even farther. The first step is to do an energy audit to see where you can conserve. Often, most household energy waste is through heat loss; major conservation can be achieved here with added insulation, especially in the attic and the basement, and recaulking around doors and windows. Energy savings can also be made by replacing older inefficient appliances. Special attention should be paid to how you heat water: you can wrap your water

heater, install an on-demand water heater, or purchase a solar pre-heater, which is especially effective in saving energy if you have a family pool.

After reducing energy needs through conservation, you need to choose a backup system for emergency power. Here Jeff noted that the backup generator he installed was not really a very efficient way to run his sump pump when the hydro went out. Decide how much backup power you require to run the essentials and how long you expect to need it. A wide choice is available, from gas or diesel generators to solar and wind-powered systems, but some are expensive.



Jeff also described the need for individual households to connect to local food producers.

Currently, the family farm is losing money, with most farms partly supported by off-farm income from one or more of the family. Yet locally grown food is often more nutritious than food produced in a large monocultured enterprises and transported over large distances.

Unfortunately, such food is often cheaper, as the unit cost is lower, though the workers are often underpaid, but the environmental impact of such food is far greater, though unaccounted for in the price. In the future, however, as transportation costs rise, local food will be more competitive, while a larger local market will reduce price. Already, some consumers have linked to local farmers to have them provide regular amounts of fruits and vegetables especially, so that these farmers can rely on a regular income.

As Jeff's presentation made clear, if you take steps to reduce energy consumption and consume more food produced in the local community, you will doing your part to slow climate change as well as prepare for it.

Recycling Rant

by Sue Van Slooten

Recycling dead batteries. Nicads, lithiums, good old fashioned alkalines. Seems a simple idea, right? Not. This all came about as a result of a little bug that a French lady named Charlotte, who stayed with us for a while, put in my ear. Being from France, she was shocked when she was generally advised to throw her batteries in the garbage. "What?" said she. "No little bins to drop them in at the supermarket?" No. "No little bins at the corner store?" No. "What kind of a system, country, etc., is this?" I, being the embarrassed Canadian, said "We don't do that." Not easily in Rideau Lakes anyway.



And that's what started this whole sordid affair. I made a quick phone call to our municipal government. I was already stung by the point that they no longer allow you to recycle glass. That I take it into Ottawa, where I can recycle it there. (The lengths serious recyclers are forced to go to.) I explained we at REAL wanted to start a community initiative to recycle used/dead batteries, so that they don't end up in the environment, doing all kinds of nasty damage. No can do. You need a hazardous materials license. Give me a break! Why? They're dangerous materials. What materials, I asked. Answer: don't know, never researched that. Have no idea what's inside. Car batteries have acid in them. I know that. What about nicads? What are those? Rechargeables. Oh those. And lithiums. The staffperson wasn't 100% sure those could be recycled, but thought they probably could be. I was referred to the twice yearly (at this point only one is left) hazardous waste depot the township puts on. Good idea, but only twice a year.

So I guess for now I will collect my used batteries and hope I am available to take them to the next depot in late summer.

Recycling Rant Response

Frustrating, for sure! True, batteries are considered hazardous waste and should be accepted at hazardous waste depots. That does not mean that they are recycled necessarily, but that they are disposed of safely, not in a regular landfill.

But there are lots of types of batteries around. Lead acid batteries can be recycled, and are usually accepted at businesses that sell them. There are places you can deposit rechargeable batteries (in Smiths Falls, ask at Lockwood's). Most alkaline batteries no longer contain mercury, but they do contain other toxic metals. The City of Ottawa's website says small quantities can be put in the garbage. Yet we can't collect them - see the problem? In fact if you collect more than 5 kg., you would require an exemption from the Ministry of the Environment to store and transport them. What about button cell batteries? You may find businesses that accept these (such as watch and camera batteries) if you purchased them or a replacement battery there.

If you are interested in looking into this further, or in finding businesses that accept batteries for use in our Recyclopedia, please get in touch. CBC's Marketplace recently did an interesting program on battery recycling. See www.cbc.ca/marketplace and search on batteries.

In the meantime, take your used batteries to your municipality's hazardous waste depot when it is open. For Smiths Falls and Lanark County residents, the depot in Carleton Place is open Saturday mornings, June through September. Lanark Highlands and Tay Valley residents have access to a seasonal depot in Middleville. For most Leeds and Grenville municipalities, keep your ear to the ground, because you will probably only have access one or two days at the most, typically late summer.

Happy Trails

If all goes well, REAL will have produced a summary map of the existing trails in Smiths Falls and the immediate area by this spring.

The idea came out of the REAL's Climate Change Action Team (CCAT), which was interested in promoting biking as an alternative, and non-greenhouse gas producing form of transportation. It seemed one possible place to start was to make it clear what trails were already available for walking, biking or skiing. By "trail" we really mean a "route". For example, the Cataraqui Trail is a dedicated path, but the Rideau Trail incorporates the path that links Victoria and Lower Reach Parks, but also uses existing roads.



The trail map would be of use to residents and tourists as well. Many of the "boat people" coming to Smiths Falls via the Rideau Canal pack bikes so they can get around on land.

A Katimavik participant, Justyn Crisp, spent a few weeks doing some preliminary work on this in late December and early January. If you are a biking or walking enthusiast, perhaps you could suggest some possible routes that we don't know about. Please contact Barb at 283-9966 or dhicks11@cogeco.ca.

Replace Your Furnace Air Filter

A clogged filter wastes fuel and electricity, shortens the life of your furnace, and promotes the growth of molds and allergens.

10th Band Concert a Success

Our 10th annual concert by the Central Band of the Canadian Forces on December 5 was an unqualified success. The crowd thoroughly enjoyed the band's musical selections and the special photo tribute to the Rideau Canal put together by Simon Lunn. Cathy Bradley won the raffle of Simon's Jones Falls photo, and many concert goers won door prizes, including a gift basket from JACK-FM, a Gad's Hill restaurant gift certificate courtesy of Larry Manson, eco-bags from REAL and a book on the history of Smiths Falls donated by the Town. Thanks again to Wayne Cavanagh of JACK-FM, our Master of Ceremonies; our many Sponsors, Patrons and Enablers; and all of our volunteers for their contributions. Getting the evening together is a big project for a small group; please consider being part of the team next year.

"A Rideau Tribute" DVD Selling Well

The "Rideau Tribute" collection of 175 photos of the Rideau by Simon Lunn has been a success. Thanks to the Perth Citizens Band for providing their recording of "Moonlight on the Rideau" for the project, and Larry Manson for putting it all together. This DVD is a great keepsake of the Rideau Canal's 175th anniversary celebration, and the waterway's designation as a World Heritage Site - events that will be so important to this area's future. We were pleased to sell 125 copies of "A Rideau Tribute" on concert night December alone. The DVDs continued to sell well over the Christmas season. They are still available in Smiths Falls at: Rideau Canal Museum, Heritage House Museum, Dawn's Closet, Bham's Kiosk, and Everything We Love in Davidson's Court; in Merrickville at Wood-n-Feathers; and in Perth at Kelly's Flowers and Fine Things. A bargain at \$5, all proceeds to REAL. The WoodKnot has offered to make the DVD's available through their online store, if you have friends and relatives from far away who would like a copy. See www.thewoodknot.ca.

We are hoping to have more opportunities for sales once the tourist season begins. If you could lend a hand making sure they get to outlets beyond Smiths Falls, please contact Peter Au, 284-8338 or aaapeterau@cogeco.ca.

GCC Hopes to Continue Limited Income Electricity Program

The pilot limited income electricity program wrapped up at the end of January.

Through the Energy Efficiency Assistance Plan for Houses (EEAPH), income qualified applicants received a free energy audit of their home by our certified assessor, Alan Leonard, to determine potential energy savings. On the basis of this audit, some families were chosen to have up to \$5,000 worth of free upgrades done by qualified contractors.

Initially, we and other Green Communities in the pilot were struggling to find enough limited income people who live in 100% electrically heated homes. Along the way REAL received approval to do homes which had some electric heat as part of their heating mix. We are hopeful that the Ontario Power Authority will continue the program, and include homes with other heating sources, as we know there are many limited income homes, particularly in rural areas, that could benefit from free energy upgrades.

The program helped 19 clients, 12 with full audits and 7 with basic audits. This included:

- 10 fridges replaced
- 4 attics insulated
- 1 crawlspace insulated
- 1 basement insulated
- 2 hot water tank insulating blankets
- 6 low flow shower heads
- 8 low flow kitchen aerators
- 81 compact fluorescent lightbulbs, all types
- many hours of energy conservation education

and resulted in about 25000 KWh/yr of electricity saved, or about 20 tons of CO2.

Many positive comments were received from the applicants, such as:

- "I feel it's like Christmas. It is great having a new fridge, I didn't know when the old one was going to die."
- "I feel warmer in here already. The guy who insulated the attic was very nice and cleaned up and everything."
- "We have started to do some of the things you recommended and are going to complete the rest soon."
- "Thank you so much, we are looking forward to saving some money and being warmer."
- "I thought I was doing everything I could to save electricity but now I am going to do more and keep the money in my pocket."

Mercury for the Tuna Consumer

Fish is an important source of protein and omega-3, but be careful not to overdo the tuna! High levels of mercury in tuna are of particular concern for pregnant or nursing women and young children.



In the body mercury acts as a neurotoxin, interfering with the brain and nervous system. Even in low doses, mercury may affect a child's development, effects ranging from attention span to mental retardation. In adults, mercury can affect fertility and blood pressure, and cause memory loss, tremors, vision loss and numbness of the fingers and toes. However, high levels of blood mercury will drop eventually if the consumption of mercury is reduced.

Mercury content of tuna varies. The bigger the fish, the higher the mercury content, so beware

of tuna steaks. Read canned tuna labels carefully. Chunk Light canned tuna (skipjack) is a medium mercury content fish. Canned white or albacore tuna can contain almost three times as much mercury. Troll caught albacore tuna fish are smaller and contain less mercury, but the can may not tell you how they were caught.

Canned light, 0.118 ppm
Canned albacore, 0.353 ppm
Albacore, fresh/ frozen, .357 ppm
Albacore, troll-caught, 0.14 ppm
Tuna, Big Eye, .639 ppm
(Source: *Gotmercury.org*)

To keep mercury exposure to recommended limits, an adult should not consume more than two cans of light tuna per week. Halve that for pregnant and nursing women or children from birth to four. If you are eating canned albacore tuna, stick to only one can per month. This assumes you are not eating other seafood containing mercury. For a mercury calculator that considers your weight and the mercury levels in 75 types of seafood, see www.gotmercury.org.

Mercury levels in salmon are generally low, so do not pose such a health concern. In fact in canned salmon it is almost undetectable. Swordfish, shark, tilefish, and king mackerel should be avoided or eaten sparingly because of their high methylmercury content.

Polycarbonate Plastic Water Bottles

You may want to take a look through your cupboards and discard any hard plastic water bottles or other food containers marked with the recycling number 7 symbol. Polycarbonate plastic is made mostly of bisphenol A, and derived from petrochemicals. The chemical seeps out of the plastic when heated or exposed to acids, or as it ages.

Several studies have suggested bisphenol mimics estrogen and causes hormone disruption and

related illness, though manufacturers claim it is safe. Health Canada is conducting an assessment of bisphenol A and expects to issue preliminary results this spring, and a final report on the safety of the chemical in 2009. The Ontario government is also evaluating the chemical.

In the meantime, Mountain Equipment Coop has pulled most polycarbonate water bottles and food containers from their shelves. The company has been known for its brightly coloured polycarbonate Nalgene water bottles.



Bisphenol A is also used in the epoxy resin that lines food cans and in sealants used to reduce tooth decay.

Phthalates, a compound used in polyvinyl chloride plastics (PVC), has also raised serious concerns. It is much harder to avoid because it is used in such a wide variety of products other than food and beverage containers: shower curtains, teething toys, upholstery, flooring, medical equipment and cosmetics to name a few.

When choosing a plastic water bottle, it is recommended you avoid plastics with recycling numbers 3 (PVC), 6 or 7. Stick to numbers 1, 2, 4, or 5. Numbers 1 (PET) or 2 (HDPE) are not recommended for reuse. Consider a stainless steel water bottle. Canadian Tire sells them, and Mountain Equipment Coop has a big selection. If you must use polycarbonate (No. 7), do not heat liquids in it, and discard if it becomes worn looking or cloudy.

A great summary on plastics can be found at deliciousorganics.com/Controversies/plastic.htm

In REAL Life

The next meeting of the **Climate Change Action Team (CCAT)** is Thursday, February 21, following Chris Weissflog's presentation on renewable energy for the home (see cover story). All welcome. Presentation starts at 7 p.m. at the Rideau Canal Museum, Smiths Falls.

Saumure's continue to lend us the use of a **temporary office in the former SFDCI** at 2 Gould Street. Knock loudly on the door at the west entrance (it's locked) and follow the phone cord to the lower level, where we have found it's a lot warmer! Julie is usually in the office 9 - 12 weekdays, but call ahead to be sure.

Rideau Lakes residents take note - the township is no longer collecting glass with its recyclables. They don't have a market for it. Wine and liquor bottles can be returned to The Beer Store. Maybe you can find a friend in a neighbouring municipality who will put your glass in their recycling for you.

Kill-a-watt Meters are now available through the **three public libraries: Almonte, Perth and Smiths Falls Public Library**. These devices can be borrowed at no charge and used to measure the electricity usage of your appliances.

Helpful Websites

- The Environmental Health Association of Nova Scotia's www.lesstoxicguide.ca. Potential health risks of commonly used products, less toxic alternatives and where to find them. (Thanks to Modern Thymes for this reference.)
- The Ottawa based website pureknowhow.com concentrates on personal care products.
- www.safecosmetics.org:80 is quite an eye-opener as well, but note that U.S. and Canadian regulations differ.

If you have found a website to be a particularly helpful source of information on an environmental issue, please submit it to the REAL Update.

Watch for further details on **RideauGreen, A Green Build and Alternative Energy Home Show**, Saturday, March 29, 9 a.m. - 5 p.m. at the Lombardy Agricultural Hall. Admission free. Sponsored by Rideau Home Hardware.

Next Issue

Submissions for the April issue can be sent to dhicks11@cogeco.ca by Mar. 15, 2008 or call Barb at (613) 283-9966.

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The REAL DEAL Environment Centre

To book Well Aware Visits, or to find out more about our energy programs,

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