

REAL Update



For members and friends of the Rideau Environmental Action League

May 2005

Pitch-In 2005 Results



We can safely say that we experienced the worst Pitch-In weather we've ever had on Saturday, April 23. But the 6 degree C temperature and constant rain did not deter 45 committed environmentalists from donning their rain gear and scouring Smiths Falls for trash. While the weather certainly reduced the participation, those who came were very enthusiastic. Luckily much had been picked up in the two preceding weeks, and the groups that chose not to work in the rain on Saturday will be cleaning their designated locations when the weather improves. Totals for the week were at least 248 people, all 418 Chimo students, and 158 bags of garbage, 26 of recyclables and 19 large items retrieved.

The general impression was that many areas were not as litter-infested as in other years, but other sites are still quite atrocious, notably Lower Reach Park, Victoria Street and the train station, and the Industrial Park. Some of the new volunteers to Pitch-in found the amount of trash a real eye-opener.

Some of the more unusual finds included a street sign, dead fish, large pieces of rotten beef, toothbrushes, a car headlight, bikes, a lawn umbrella, a piece of eavestroughing, a coin sorter, an empty wallet, and too many cigarette butts everywhere, including near the hospital, of all places.

The cold and wet volunteers were greeted with a hot dog lunch, hot drinks and a slide show at the Legion.

The committee and REAL Board will be considering where to go from here. A possibility for next year would be to scale this down somewhat and simply coordinate assigning of groups to locations over a two-week period leading up to the final Saturday, but not emphasizing that day, so that volunteers can choose a time convenient to them and avoid the vagaries of Saturday weather.

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REAL would like to thank, once again, Scotiabank for its financial contribution, and Tim Horton's for its advertising, cookies for the lunch, and providing a free cookie coupon to all participants. Canadian Tire, Giant Tiger, Garden Market and the Perth and Smiths Falls District Hospital all contributed supplies. The groups, many of which have participated every year, were given a certificates of appreciation. Many individuals and REAL members came out as well. We appreciate the dedication of Mayor Dennis Staples and Dave Hartwell of Smiths Falls Utility and Environmental Services who joined the pickup on Saturday, and the town staff for their cooperation.

Thanks to the Men's Breakfast Club, our volunteer garbagemen for Saturday; New Horizons and the Legion ladies for the lunch; Parks Canada for the use of their projector; the Legion for use of the hall; to Stephen Haggart for taking the photos of volunteers throughout the week and the Saturday slide show; and to Isobel Conlin for her tireless efforts coordinating the community groups.

The Pitch-in Committee of Brenda King, Elva Corless, Isobel Conlin and Barb Hicks appreciate the community's support of this annual event.

CHEO Physicians Against Pesticides

The following is taken from an editorial by Dr. Robin Walker and Gideon Froman in the Ottawa Citizen, April 13, 2005.

Physicians across the province are advising residents to avoid pesticides and are recommending the use of lawn-care methods and products that are non-toxic.

The recommendation follows the release in April, 2004 of a ground-breaking review of pesticide studies by the Ontario College of Family Physicians (OCFP), an association representing more than 6,700 family doctors. The OCFP's systematic review -- the most comprehensive in Canadian history -- found

consistent links between pesticide use and serious illnesses such as cancer, reproductive problems and neurological diseases.

Doctors are saying that, even when used as directed, pesticides could be extremely harmful to children and to adults. Leading health organizations -- including the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Ontario College of Family Physicians, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario, and the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment -- are urging Canadian cities to pass bylaws prohibiting cosmetic or non-essential pesticide use.

These health authorities are urging citizens to maintain their properties without poisons. Homeowners can control insect pests by using nematodes. They can control weeds by aerating their soil, applying natural compost, recycling grass clippings, keeping grass long (at least three inches), and overseeding.

A phasing out of pesticides isn't supported only by the medical community. In Ottawa, Oracle Poll Research found that 83 per cent of city residents support a pesticide phase-out in Ottawa's parks, while 76 per cent support a phase-out on private residential properties. Seventy four percent said pesticides pose a health threat to children.

In fact, Ottawa residents are so concerned about these chemicals they also want city council to pass a bylaw prohibiting their use. Across Canada, pesticide bylaws have been passed by some 70 communities, including Montreal, Toronto and Halifax. *(Editor's note: Perth has also passed a pesticide control by-law.)*

Dr. Robin Walker, M.D. is professor of pediatrics at the University of Ottawa and a member of the Division of Neonatology at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario. Gideon Forman is executive director of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment.

Naturalized Landscaping Workshop

Tuesday, May 17, 7 p.m.

Rideau Canal Museum, Smiths Falls

Bring photos of your property and receive expert guidance from David Bethune, of REAL and of Green Spaces Landscaping



Admission Free
Donations Welcome

Call Museum
at 284-0505

Nominations for REAL Awards Sought

Do you know of an area individual or group who has set a good environmental example for the rest of us? REAL is now accepting nominations for its 2005 Environmental Awards. Nominees should have achieved success in educating others on environmental issues, have participated in a successful environmental project or have demonstrated commitment to environmentally friendly practices.

Four awards will be given: two for individuals (within REAL and from outside of REAL), and two for groups or companies (within REAL and from outside of REAL). Nominations should be submitted to Tom Foulkes at 283-2706 (tpfoulkes@ripnet.com) or Bunny Haughton at 283-1843 (haughms@falls.igs.net) by May 22, 2005. Please be prepared to provide some details on the nominee's environmental activities.

The awards will be presented at REAL's Annual General Meeting to be held Wednesday evening, June 15 at Heritage House Museum, Smiths Falls.

Science Fair Award Presented

We congratulate this year's recipient of the REAL Environmental Award at the Smiths Falls and District Science Fair held March 22 at the County Fair Mall.

Laura Kravacek from North Elmsley Public School was commended for her project "Hydrogen Fueling Our Future", which suggested that hydrogen could be a highly renewable and environmentally safe alternative fuel source.

Besides a cash award, her name will be inscribed on a plaque along with previous award winners, and she will receive a complimentary REAL student membership in REAL. The REAL Environmental Award has been granted every year since 1989.



Towards an Expanded Reuse Centre

It has long been a vision of REAL to expand and improve the existing Reuse Centre. This was included in both our five-year Strategic and Business Plans. At last, we are making progress.

Our first coup was securing funding from the Eastern Ontario Development Fund, delivered by Valley Heartland, to hire an intern to write a Feasibility Study and Business Plan for an Expanded Reuse Centre. We were extremely fortunate to find Andrea Swain to complete the task. Andrea has a demonstrated interest in waste management and experience with Reuse Centres. With the funds, REAL was able to employ Andrea for the period January through March, supervised by Susan Brandum. Andrea continues to pursue this project on a volunteer basis - talk about commitment!

We plan to open a Reuse Centre which will carry the same “freestore” items we now carry in the small Reuse Centre; sell furniture and demolition and construction waste which is in high demand for renovation and cottage projects; and position ourselves to be able to refurbish and properly dispose of electronic waste. Part of the excitement about this new “social enterprise” is that it will create jobs, particularly for disadvantaged people in the Smiths Falls area.

The Feasibility Study was presented to the REAL Board and other members with an active interest in the Reuse Centre in late February. The study showed us that:

- a) Yes, an expanded Reuse Centre is feasible, provided we can locate cost-effective space that meets our criteria and that we can secure funding for start-up and at least one additional year of operations.
- b) We should proceed in a three-stage progression, adding furniture and other larger household items, then construction and demolition waste while positioning ourselves to take advantage of electronic waste recycling should the opportunity arise.

With the approval of the REAL Board, a Reuse Centre Sub-committee was struck to take the project to the next level. Peter Au and Susan Brandum co-chair the committee and REAL members include Elva Corless, Brenda King and Andrea Swain. The sub-committee’s first steps are to:

1. **Locate a suitable 5000-7000 sq. ft. space.** The cost of the space will be a determining factor in whether or not we can make the Reuse Centre self-sustaining. We have investigated a few places, but would certainly welcome any other suggestions!
2. **Develop a mission statement for the Reuse Centre.** We need to develop a mission statement that explains how REAL will reinvest the profit from the store in protecting the environment, so that people feel confident that their free donations to the centre will provide genuine assistance.

3. **Establish a Board for the Reuse Centre.** A number of people who have the skills and energy to contribute to the expansion of the Reuse Centre have been identified. We are pleased to announce that Ken Graham and Dawn Quinn have joined the Reuse Centre Committee/Board. As well, we have added an Advisory Committee for the centre including Mayor Dennis Staples, Norm Ruttan, president of iwastenot.com, Paul Cormier of RANA International, and Diane Pearen of Lanark County Ontario Works. This committee will meet a couple of times a year to provide advice to the centre. Invitations are outstanding to additional candidates for the Committee/Board .
4. **Public Relations Activities.** The Committee needs to inform, invite, and excite the various individuals and organizations who will be critical to the success of the expanded Reuse Centre. We want to ensure that we have “buy-in” from those people who will play a role in the expansion of the Reuse Centre. The sub-committee has already presented to and received supportive response from the councils of Montague, Rideau Lakes, Perth, Drummond/North Elmsley and the Environmental Advisory Committees of the councils of Tay Valley and Lanark Highlands. Delegations are scheduled for Beckwith, Carleton Place, Elizabethtown-Kitley and Smiths Falls. As well, the committee and REAL are writing a new column “REAL Actions” in the Record News and EMC to inform citizens about our developments.
5. **Oversee Funding Proposals.** REAL requires funds to hire staff to oversee the planning of the expansion, implement the business plan and manage the centre. This is far too big a task to expect anyone to do on a volunteer basis. The committee is developing applications to a number of funders, including Trillium and welcomes contributions to this project.

The Sub-committee and Reuse Centre Board will review the Business Plan in early May.

The expansion of the Reuse Centre is an exciting prospect for Lanark, Leeds and Grenville. It will build on the success of our current Reuse Centre so that it becomes a large, dynamic catalyst for many solid waste reduction and reuse businesses and jobs.

The (Plastic) Bag Beast

From an article by Michael Jessen. Read the full text at www.nelsonbc.ca/pages/jessen/The_Bag_Beast.htm.

They're cheap, functional, lightweight, resource efficient, moisture resistant – and too popular! The seemingly innocuous plastic bag is under attack around the world as countries from Ireland to Australia seek to tax or ban them.

Relied on by consumers to do everything from carrying groceries to scooping up doggie do and disposing of garbage, plastic bag use has mushroomed in North America and Western Europe. Factories churned out an astounding four to five trillion of them in 2002.

Compared with paper bags, producing plastic ones uses less energy and water and generates less air pollution and solid waste. Plastic bags also take up less space in the landfill, but most of them never make it to the landfill and even fewer of them are recycled.

After being discarded, many plastic bags go airborne and they're increasingly getting caught in trees, fences, or the stomachs of birds and other animals. They end up clogging gutters, sewers and waterways. This led the Irish to call the bags their "national flag" and South Africans to dub them the "national flower."

So in March 2002 the government of Ireland imposed a 15-cent tax on each bag to control the country's consumption of 1.2 billion plastic shopping bags per year. The consumer was charged at check out and behaviour changed immediately. The tax resulted in a 90 to 95 percent drop in consumption.

The so-called "PlasTax" also raised \$9.6 million dollars in its first year that the Irish government earmarked for a "green fund" for waste management and environmental initiatives. Retailers in Ireland, many of whom are now selling reusable bags, are also happy since they were spending \$50 million a year on single-use plastic bags before the tax. More dramatically, approximately 18 million litres of oil have been saved due to reduced production of plastic bags.

This is one product that actually does more harm than good. Imagining our lives without plastic bags should be possible. The environment and many of Earth's creatures will thank you.

Facts about Plastic Bags:

- Well over a billion single-use plastic bags are given out for free every day.
- North America and Western Europe account for nearly 80 percent of plastic bag use.
- Each year, Americans throw away 100 billion polyethylene plastic bags. Only 0.6 percent of plastic bags are recycled.
- Giving free plastic bags to consumers is costing US retailers \$4 billion annually.
- In a landfill, plastic bags take up to 1,000 years to biodegrade. As litter, they break down into tiny bits, contaminating both soil and water.
- An estimated 8 billion pounds of plastic bags, wraps and sacks enter the waste stream every year in the US alone.



**REAL AGM AND BBQ
Wed., June 15 at 6 p.m.
Heritage House Museum**

Simple Things You Can Do (adapted from worldwatch.org)

1. Think twice about taking a plastic bag if your purchase is small and easy to carry.
2. Keep reusable cloth bags in your home, office, and car so you always have them available when you shopping.
3. Ask stores to stop providing free bags, or to offer a discount for not using the bags.
4. Encourage your local politicians to introduce legislation taxing or banning plastic bags.

“Make a REAL Difference” Hemp Bags

REAL will soon be selling “Make a REAL Difference” Hemp grocery bags to raise funds and, quite frankly, to make a REAL difference.

For too long, REAL Board Directors and members have watched too many people continue to use plastic bags at grocery stores.

So, we decided to do something about it. But, we’re an environmental organization and we weren’t content to simply get regular cotton bags. Cotton uses higher volumes of more toxic pesticides than any other crop – a quarter of the world’s pesticides are sprayed on it, causing a million cases of human poisoning every year. (*Ethical Consumer*, no 50, Dec 1997/Jan 1998). As well, growing cotton requires intensive irrigation and has contributed to, for example, the poisoning and drying up of the Aral Sea. Even growing organic cotton (without pesticides) demands intensive irrigation. And, virtually all the cotton bags supplied by printing and promotional houses are manufactured in Asia. No promotional company we talked to could assure us that the bags were not manufactured in sweatshops.

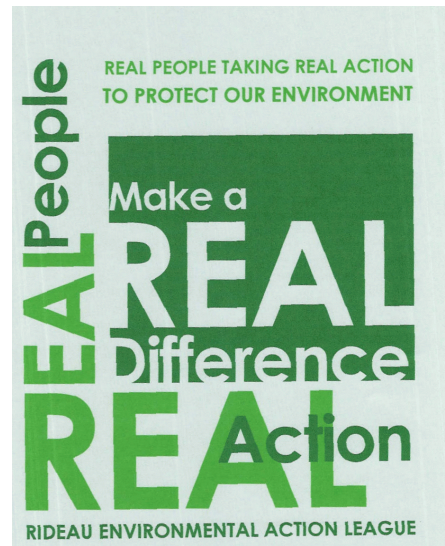
So, REAL embarked on an arduous and lengthy search to find the most environmentally benign reusable bag we could get. And, we have amazing success. We are able to get hemp fabric, which is grown without pesticides and requires

little water. We have found a “local” manufacturer, a woman in Lindsay, Ontario who has a cottage industry producing such bags. And, we had a wonderful graphic arts student at Ottawa’s Algonquin College by the name of Katie Blume who approached us to volunteer doing the design. We think you’ll be as wowed as we are and that you’ll be seeing Katie’s name all over the place. You will be able to say that you have an original Katie Blume design when you buy this bag.

At this point in the economy, getting an environmentally friendly product does cost more at the outset.

But when you buy this bag, you’ll know that you haven’t added any pesticides to the environment whose costs come back in health problems; you’ll know that you haven’t contributed to wasting water; you’ll know that you have helped support an Ontario business in the manufacturing; you’ll know that each time you use it, you won’t be using a plastic bag and adding to the mountains of problems from plastic bags; and, most importantly, you’ll know that you’re helping REAL implement its many projects. In other words, you’ll be “Making a REAL Difference.”

You can pre-order a bag by emailing info@rideauenvironmentalactionleague.org or calling Elva Corless at 283-0309.



EnerGuide for Houses and Grants

Seven years ago, when LL Green had its store in the County Fair Mall, we conducted Green Home Visits with 300 homeowners in the region, explaining how they could reduce their energy

costs. A few of our clients took us up on a new process, the EnerGuide for Houses. LL Green was one of the first organizations in the country to make the EnerGuide for Houses available.

Those of you who had an EGH back then may be eligible for the government grants that reimburse you based on your reduced energy usage after you have made the retrofits recommended in your EGH report.

LL Green's clients would have had the EGH assessment completed either by Jonathon Ham or Ross Elliott. Because too few people in this area saw the benefits of having the EGH back then, LL Green passed its EGH program off to its colleague Green Community, Envirocentre in Ottawa. Jonathon and Ross work through Envirocentre now. Ross Elliott recently presented a seminar on the EGH and the grants at the Scotiabank in Smiths Falls.

To find out if you are eligible for the grants, contact Envirocentre at www.envirocentre.ca/english/intro.html or call 613-580-2582. For general information on the EGH and the grants, check out the EGH website at oee.nrcan.gc.ca/english/index.cfm and go to Residential and Personal.

If you're concerned about rising heating costs (and who isn't?) now is the time to have an EGH. This process tells you exactly what you need to do in your own house – it's a customized process – to reduce your heating costs. Results from previous studies show that homeowners on average reduced their energy use by 23%!

We Wait for Well Aware, but Don't Wait for Money to Upgrade/Decommission Wells

LL Green has already chalked up five requests for speakers on the Well Aware program this spring, but so far we're not able to comply with them. We're still waiting to hear if the Ministry of Environment will continue to fund the program. Apparently, both the Minister and the Ministry are highly impressed with the pilot

project that was delivered over the past two years.

We've been told that they see Well Aware as *the* program to address the needs of personal, private well owners in Ontario. This is a kudo for REAL and LL Green as we identified the need for and developed the first rural water stewardship program which was then redeveloped into Well Aware.

In January, Susan Brandum conducted a Well Aware Guided Self Assessment with Leona Dombrowski, Ontario Minister of the Environment, to provide the Minister with information as she considers turning the pilot into a full-fledged program. Stay tuned. Hopefully, good news will arrive shortly.

In the meantime, take advantage of the funding available to upgrade or decommission your well or repair your septic system. RVCA's Rural Clean Water Program will provide up to \$500 towards the cost of an upgrade (roughly \$1,000-1,500) and up to \$1,000 to decommission an old well. Taking an old well out of commission is critical to protecting your new well. As well, the program will provide up to \$1,000 to repair a septic system and other funds to stabilize shorelines and plant windbreaks for rural residents. Go to www.rideauvalley.on.ca and click on Rural Clean Water Program or contact 1-800-387-5304.

Reuse Centre Needs

From time to time visitors come to the Reuse Centre looking for specific items. If you have any of these lingering in your basement, garage or attic and would like them to find a good home, bring them to the Reuse Centre Wednesdays 1:30 to 4:00 or Saturdays 9:30 to noon.

Needed items: Rotor convertor box, crock pot, blender, duotangs, geometry set, picture frames, toaster, wooden clothes rack, dresser, wooden

door 30 x 80, cast period lamps, bath and kitchen scales, marble rolling pin, small microwave ovens.

And don't forget our online service, www.Rideau.Reuses.com for doing some online swapping!

Summer Events

REAL will be represented at a number of public events this summer, and could use some help. We are looking for members to volunteer for three hour shifts.

- Smiths Falls Chocolate and Railway Festival, July 15-17. The display will be at the docking point for the Voyageur Canoe Tours, and so may involve other duties. Contact Peter, 284-8338.
- Art of Being Green Festival in Lanark Village, July 23 and 24. Volunteering means free admission! Contact Sue Brandum , 267-2257.
- Perth Garlic Festival, August 13 and 14. Contact Sue.

Mow Down Pollution

The Mow Down Pollution program campaign was named one of two finalists in the Community Awards Climate Change Category in the 2005 Canadian Environmental Awards. During this year's campaign, April 28 to May 2, any old lawn mower or lawn trimmer taken to Home Depot qualified for an instant rebate of between \$10 and \$100 on the purchase of a new, cleaner-alternative mower or trimmer. The goal was to retire 4,000 gas powered mowers across Canada.

Why the fuss about lawnmowers? Greenhouse gases. A typical older gas-powered mower produces 48 kg. of



GHG in a season - as much as a car driven 550 kilometres. To calculate what your model of mower is producing, see the calculator at cleanairfoundation.org/mow_down/index.asp.

Announcements

Tuesday, May 17 at 7 p.m. **Naturalized Landscaping Workshop** at Rideau Canal Museum, Smiths Falls. Bring a photo of your property and get advice from David Bethune. Call Museum at 284-0505.

Wednesday, June 15 at 6 p.m. **REAL AGM and Barbeque** at Heritage House Museum. RSVP to Barb at 283-9966.

Wednesdays, 1:30 - 4:00 and Saturdays, 9:30 - 12 , **Reuse Centre**, end of Johnston St., Smiths Falls. Free exchange of household goods too good to throw away. Call Elva at 283-0309.

1st and 3rd Saturdays of the month, 9 - 12. **Plastics (#2 through #7) Recycling Depot** open to Drummond-North Elmsley and Perth residents, at Town Yard, Perth.

Membership Rates

Annual rates are: Individuals - \$15, Families - \$20, Students - \$5, Corporate - \$50. If you haven't sent in your 2005 renewal yet, please do it today!



Contact Us

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