

Annual Report

Feb. 1, 2024—Jan. 31, 2025



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Looking forward to an exciting year ahead

As the new President of REAL, I am filled with optimism and enthusiasm for the upcoming year. Reflecting on last year's activities, the community support from members, volunteers, customers, municipal partners and corporate partners has been remarkable. This support has enabled us to continue to deliver existing programs as well as implement new initiatives such as the Mini Forest.

Thank you to Katie Hoffman, our outgoing President, for her hard-work, enthusiasm, and leadership on behalf of REAL.

As we look ahead, our focus will be on building upon the progress we have made and exploring new opportunities for growth.

Together we can work to protect our environment.

Karen Schechter

SOME OF OUR PROJECTS

The REAL Deal Reuse Store	2
Greening Projects: Monarch and Depave Gardens, Community Gardens, Compost Demo Site and Trees at Hyland Park	3
Spring Garden Fundraiser	3
Pitch in and Shoreline Cleanup	3
Mini Forest	4
Fall Online Auction	4
Evergreen Avenue	5
Heat Pump and Energy Services	5
Tool Library	5
Behind the Scenes	6
Out in the Community	6

REAL people taking REAL action to protect our environment.

THE REAL DEAL REUSE STORE

The REAL Deal Store continues to attract attention from a broad cross section of people from close to home in Lanark, Leeds and Grenville, and from further afield, especially on Saturdays! We are pleased to see that shopping second hand first is becoming more mainstream. People make good use of our FaceBook page and Facebook Marketplace to see what we have in stock. Unfortunately, sales have been uneven, and lower this summer than usual, although some individual days sales have been excellent. Our store relies heavily on donations to close the recycling loop and ensure we cover our operating costs.

Staff. We operate with a combined total of 4.5 full time staff and about a dozen volunteers. Dan Cunningham has been the Store Manager since the fall of 2019, and Heather and Bev share cashier duties. The group of yard staff fluctuates. Jim, Josh and Matt have moved on, and by the end of the year we had Joel, Andrew, Marshall and Arnold. Chester continues half time on electronics testing, cleaning and whatever needs doing. For the second year our application for federal funding to hire a student was turned down and we were unable to hire a summer student. We did benefit from support from OnTrac to provide training for some staff, and we enjoyed having them with us.



Volunteers. Regular volunteers include Donna, Margot, Barb, Lori, Julia, Brenda, Nancy, Una, Diane and newcomer Edwige. Kevin and Andrew from Lanark Community Programs volunteer as well. Max, Jim and Aira helped in the Tool Library. A high school student, Ethan, did his co-op placement with us. Donna McKenna and Barb Hicks oversee REAL Deal operations for the Board in addition to volunteering in smalls. A festive turkey dinner was organized for staff, volunteers and board members in December and was enjoyed by all.

Challenges. The outdoor staff have to contend with some very unpleasant weather. At times we have had to close the yard until snow could be cleared, or because the heat was too extreme. We are now closing the dome to customers, staff and volunteers if it reaches 38 degrees. Extreme weather really keeps the customers away also. Security challenges can be very disheartening. Ewaste theft continues to be an issue, and we have found that locking the bin just means the lock will get cut off. There have been fewer instances of roof leaks this years, we have had some trouble with the baseboard heaters in the front rooms, and the usual visits by mice.

Spring Garden Fundraiser

Our spring rain barrel and plant sale went very well and the weather cooperated, too! We had a selection of native plants from Grow Wild in Omeme, bareroot saplings and dogwood from the Kemptville Ferguson Forestry Centre, and seeds from our own garden to go along with the rain barrels. Trinity United Church sold mushroom compost from our parking lot that day and on subsequent weekends. Proceeds from the day are used for plants and other supplies for our monarch gardens. We continued to sell rain barrels and the leftover saplings throughout the summer but for the first time had barrels left over at the end of the season, partly due to the wetter summer.

Electronics Recycling

The store collected 29 tonnes of materials, up slightly over last year, earning us \$4,300. People appreciate that they can now drop off small appliances along with their unwanted electronic items. This gives staff another option for appliances that we determine do not work well enough to sell. Fewer cabinet style TVs are coming in, but we still get a lot of very large flat-screened TVs. Unfortunately, there has been unauthorized access to the bin after hours by some very determined thieves. We do not permit scavenging!

GREENING PROJECTS

Monarch Gardens. The monarch garden team met weekly to work on either the REAL Deal monarch gardens or the “Depave” gardens at Town Square. This year Phase 3 was planted with medicinal plants. REAL receives many positive comments about the garden.

Community Gardens. The 12 plots were rented early in the season. Staff looked after the grass cutting and filling the water barrels so gardeners could concentrate on planting, tending and harvesting their plots. Some of the raised boxes are deteriorating (the first ones were built in 2010), so will

require some repair.

Compost Demo Site. One of our community gardeners, Phil Kennedy, looked after the demonstration composting units over the season. Much of finished product was used on REAL’s gardens in the fall.

Trees at Hyland Park. It was acknowledged that it will take the mini forest some time to provide shade, so REAL planted four larger trees on the east side on the park in early spring. A few saplings left over on the mini forest planting day were added along the fence, too.



PITCH IN AND SHORELINE CLEANUPS

Thanks to volunteer Joanne Constantine for organizing this year’s cleanups. Residents participated in a community wide litter cleanup April 20 – May 4. The Shoreline Cleanup May 4 saw several trouble spots along the Rideau Waterway, including near the Bascule Bridge and by the Jasper Road boat launch, cleaned up.

Planning for the Future

If the state of the local environment is important to you, please consider supporting REAL, your local environmental organization, with a one time or monthly tax deductible donation. Cheques can be mailed or dropped at the store. For credit card donations see our ["Join"](#) page on our website, REALaction.ca. You can also do an e-transfer to payments@REALaction.ca. To explore how you could include REAL in your estate planning, see our website under the ["Donate"](#) tab.

Fall Online Auction

Our fall online auction continues to grow. This year the event attracted \$3557 in bids on the 176 items up for auction. About 170 people took part. Most of the items were gently used items collected at the REAL Deal Store, supplemented with some interesting donations from the community. The last half hour is always interesting as there is intense bidding for certain items. When buyers come to pick up their items, they take the time to look around and learn what we have to offer, so the auction is a good promotional tool. We were also grateful for the continued support of some REAL folks who contributed as sponsors, adding \$850 to our total.

MINI FOREST

REAL created the first Smiths Falls Mini Forest in 2024, a 35th anniversary project for REAL. A mini-forest is a small, densely planted community of native trees and shrubs planted on an urban site. All over the world communities are using the Miyawaki method to mimic the complexity of a native forest, and producing taller forests in a shorter period of time.

The town provided a 100 square meter site at the north end of Hyland Park and provided many supports along the way. In April volunteers from the community came one Saturday morning to prepare the site. Layers of cardboard, leaves, compost and woodchips were put down and were left to establish a soil layer for planting. Some Grade 7/8 students from Duncan J. Schouler School had created paint stir sticks with inspiring messages that were placed in the bed just prior to a brief opening ceremony.

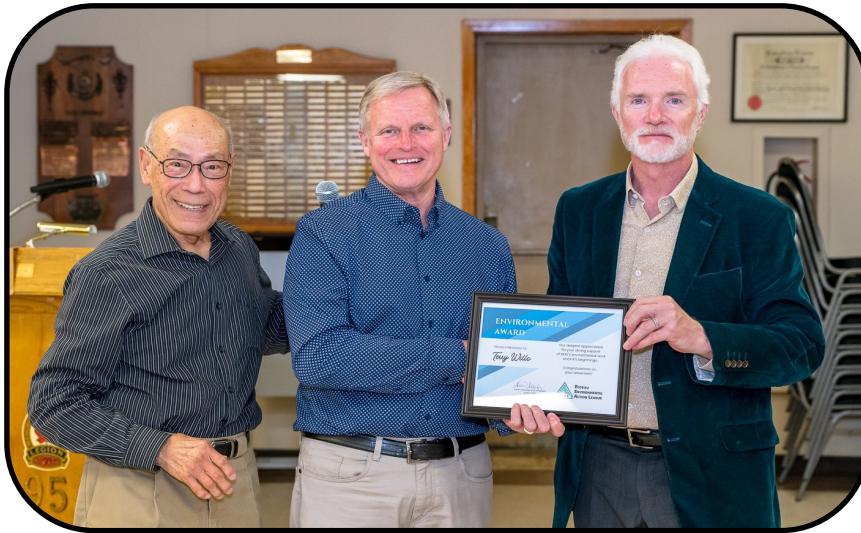


Volunteers returned on October 5 to plant 300 trees and shrubs in the space. The plants are selected according to a specific formula for the type of forest chosen, and were sourced by Steve Rauche of Diggin' It Nursery. Plants were colour coded with flags to ensure a proper distribution of height levels in the marked out one metre squares. Everyone had some instruction on proper planting technique by Craig Sinclair before they started. The planting day was a great community event, it was encouraging to see so many people take an interest.

The next week some large landscaping stones were placed on three edges of the site courtesy of Campbell's trucking. REAL will be monitoring the forest over the next few years to ensure weeds don't get established, and that it is watered if necessary.

EVERGREEN AVENUE

The Evergreen Avenue Committee hosted an event on June 2 to dedicate the two latest commemorative stones placed at Victoria Park. Being honoured this year were Richard Shanks and Jim Jenkins. REAL took this opportunity to present several environmental awards. Dan Andress and Terry Wills were recognized for their outstanding support of REAL and the local environment through their businesses. Craig Sinclair was applauded for promoting and teaching tree care in our community, and his enthusiastic participation in REAL's greening projects. Past President Katie Hoffman was awarded an Honorary Lifetime Membership in REAL for her consistent and dedicated commitment to REAL's activities.



HEAT PUMP & ENERGY SERVICES

REAL introduced a new Heat Pump Advisory Service in January 2025. Alan, our Registered Energy Assessor, has taken specialized training he can use to help residents and their contractors choose the best heat pump system for their home. The service can be included with a Home Energy Audit, or if someone has had a recent Energy Audit, Alan can use that information to investigate heat pump suitability for a lesser fee. The HER+ home energy assessment incentive program has been discontinued, but people can still make use of the Greener Homes Loan to help finance home energy efficiency improvements. Home energy assessments help homeowners to better understand their home and reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by making strategic improvements.

2024 GCC Awards

REAL was very pleased to receive two Green Communities Canada (GCC) Awards this year. The awards celebrate excellence in the GCC national network. In addition to being selected as Green Community Member of the Year, REAL also received an Organizational Resilience Award for having reached the milestone of 35 years. The recognition is greatly appreciated given the inspiring work done in member communities across the country.



Tool Library

We have a lot of work to do to ensure our Tool Library, situated in a corner of the REAL Deal Store, lives up to its potential. For a membership fee (\$25 for 6 months, \$45 for 12 months), members are able to borrow any of the tools in our 100+ collection for one week at a time. This year we verified the inventory and changed how the tools are filed. We are interested in finding tool-savvy volunteers who would be interested in taking the lead on this project.

REAL Board of Directors

Karen Schecter
(President)
Donna McKenna
(Vice-President)
Barb Hicks (Secretary)
Dave Thornley
(Treasurer)
Peter Au

Smiths Falls Communi-
ty Liaison Dawn Quinn

Communications

REAL communicates with the community through our website, email notices to members, several Facebook pages and Instagram. More details on any of the projects highlighted here can be found in our “REAL Update” newsletter .

BEHIND THE SCENES

Many behind the scenes activities go on to keep a non profit organization like REAL healthy. We are actively searching for more board members to lighten the load, and are working on succession planning. The board meets monthly by zoom and carefully ensures that we keep within our budget. Our bookkeeper, Gwenda Kinch, plays a major role in ensuring we follow all necessary government regulations. Our Treasurer completed our applications to the Town of Smiths Falls and three adjoining municipalities (Montague, Merrickville-Wolford and Rideau Lakes) for a portion of their community funding. Our Annual General Meeting, held at SFDCl, featured two guest speakers.

OUT IN THE COMMUNITY

REAL is an active participant in the community. We welcome the opportunity to interact with the public through special events. This year we were at Earthfest in Carleton Place, the Sustainable North Grenville Fair, Rideau Roundtable’s Paddlefest, and Smiths Falls’ Newcomer event and volunteer fair. Peter Au represents REAL on the Smiths Falls Climate Protection Working Group. We support other organizations. We made a presentation to a faith group, contributed to the St. Lawrence District Science Fair, and provided various supports of materials from the REAL Deal Store. REAL contributed towards the Rideau Roundtables Shoreline Naturalization signage, and split the cost of the later summer Wetlands Awareness Tours.

STAYING IN TOUCH



85 William St. W.
Smiths Falls, ON
Wed. –Sat.
10 a.m.—5 p.m.

Box 1061
Smiths Falls, ON
K7A 5A5

(613) 283-7999

info@REALaction.ca

www.REALaction.ca

