

REAL

Annual Report

Feb. 1, 2020 to Jan. 31, 2021

Rideau Environmental Action League

REAL people taking REAL action to protect our environment.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As 2020 faded into the recesses of our minds, we all pinned our hopes on a new year. As the new year began, it didn't seem much better than the old one!

But we must change the way we think and truly be thankful that we live in the area we do, have the Government resources to try to take some of the sting out of the lockdowns, and be grateful for the health care we have.

REAL began the year with the REAL Deal Store closed until further notice, and we really had no idea when that might be. Our staff were home, staying safe and happy in the knowledge that their salaries were keeping them solvent.

COVID made it difficult to plan our year - Could we hold the rain barrel sale? Could we plan for a summer compost presentation? Could we hold the fall Harvest Dinner? All plans were on hold - awaiting inoculation.

Even though last year was dreadful, we had a busy time - as you will see as you read.....

Katie Hoffman, President



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THE
REAL DEAL
STORE
AND ENVIRONMENT CENTRE

**85 William St. W.
Smiths Falls, ON
(613) 283-7999**

**Store Open
Wed. —Sat.
10 a.m.—5 p.m.**

www.REALaction.ca



COVID AND REAL

The COVID-19 pandemic led to many changes in the world, including the REAL world. Many activities were cancelled altogether, some were altered, but very few were proceeded as usual.

Those that were cancelled altogether included Pitch In Smiths Falls, participation in any public festival type event, and the Evergreen dedication ceremony.

Home energy audits and radon meter lending were put on hold during the first shutdown, but then continued. The Journey to Sustainability activities were affected. Phase 2 of the monarch garden proceeded as planned. The community garden operated with a few restrictions imposed by the Health Unit.

Our fall local foods dinner could not take place, although we did do an online auction and approach sponsors for support to replace some of the lost revenue.

The REAL Deal Store remained closed during late March, April and May 2020 and again in January 2021.

REAL collaborated with other partners on a reusable face mask project. About ten volunteers were enlisted to sew masks which were then distributed at the REAL Deal, Modern Thymes and Smiths Falls Public Library.

Behind the scenes, the REAL Board continued to meet monthly by zoom, and presented its July AGM to zoom as well. The newsletter, website and social media outreach continued, although paper newsletters were not distributed in the community.

REAL is looking forward to continuing the projects that were not possible this year, and especially to getting out in the community more, over 2021.

JOURNEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

The Journey to Sustainability Team formed in late 2019, had full slate of in-person workshops planned, but had to scale back. A workshop on food preservation took place in September with attendees having the option of participating in person or via Zoom. An energy efficiency workshop planned for January 2021 will be postponed due to the second shutdown.

Cover photo: Eleven community garden plots were rented out in short order. Gardeners had a successful growing season despite the heat and drought. A volunteer experimented with potato boxes.



After some lobbying, community gardens in Ontario were permitted to open.



It was a challenge to purchase hand sanitizer at the start of the pandemic.



A group of volunteers sewed reusable face masks which were made available free of charge.

**REAL Board of
Directors
(January 2021)**

Katie Hoffman—President

Karen Schechter

—Vice President

Barb Hicks

—Secretary

Dave Thornley

—Treasurer

Donna McKenna

Peter Au

Town Council Liaison

- Niki Dwyer

Tom Foulkes

REAL lost a major supporter and friend with the death of Tom Foulkes December 10, 2020.

Over the past decade Tom's substantial annual donations contributed to a long list of projects, including the recycled art on the store's outside wall, the Evergreen interpretive panel, 25th anniversary projects, the coverall, public presentations, and the monarch garden. An amount has been kept in reserve for a public garden, and we are hoping 2021 will be the year.



186 rain barrels were sold throughout the season.

MONARCH GARDEN

Encouraged by the success of the Monarch Garden established in 2019 to mark REAL's 30th anniversary, a second garden on the REAL Deal site, was added.

The garden provides critical habitat for the monarch butterfly, as well as other butterflies and pollinators. The overall effect has been quite spectacular. We have had many compliments from store customers as well as from people who have made a special stop to visit or photograph the garden. Butterflies were not as numerous in 2020, but their populations are known to be variable.

A sign in the garden acknowledges our Monarch Waystation status. A summer student developed an information handout as well as a key to plants. Tours should be available in the 2021 season.

Tom Foulkes provided the seed money to establish the garden, and the committee has supplemented that with the rain barrel fundraiser both years. A number of trees and shrubs were donated and dedicated in memory of some special people. The trees will contribute to another anniversary goal, which is to plant 30 trees in our catchment area.



Phase 2 of the monarch garden attracted many pollinator and human visitors. An obelisk and log seating were added later in the season.

RAIN BARREL SALES

This year marked our second rain barrel truckload sale, delayed by a month due to COVID. We ended up with two pickup days, one that was very cold, and one a week later that took place during a heat wave. We were pleased to recruit many volunteers to assist with the distribution. Additional barrels were ordered to sell through the REAL Deal throughout the summer. In total 186 rain barrels and 3 100 L rain tanks were sold, with the proceeds between allocated between the Monarch Garden and the REAL Deal.

Out in the Community:

Entered the REAL Action Team in the annual Friends of the Library Trivia Challenge.

Sponsored a film in Perth's "Shift Happens" environmental film series.

Attended Lanark Climate Action Network February workshop.

Collaborated with Rideau Roundtable canoe cleanup of the Rideau during Waste Reduction Week.

Continue to lend three radon meters and lend Kill a Watt meters through local libraries.



Volunteers at an October Rideau River cleanup.

Home Energy Audits

About 40 home energy assessments were performed by Alan Leonard over 2020. Most are for people applying for Enbridge rebates, but some are for people simply looking to reduce home energy needs. We are optimistic a new federal program will be put into place that will lead to more home audits and renovations.

ONLINE AUCTION

REAL offered its first online fall auction, which will likely be repeated! As with the local foods dinner normally held this time of year, about twenty individuals and organizations contributed \$2000 as sponsors to support our fundraiser. We truly appreciate their financial support of environmental action in our community.

Using a web-based service called 32auctions, 92 items were posted, and 97 people registered to bid on the items online. Most of the items were gently used treasures donated to the REAL Deal, but we also had some lovely donations from friends of REAL as well. Just over \$2000 was raised from the merchandise, for a grand total of over \$4,000 for the whole event.

COMMUNICATIONS

Our communications outreach was one of the few areas relatively untouched by COVID. We continue to maintain a detailed website REALaction.ca, and issue five newsletters per year. However, most of the print copies were distributed right within the store. Instagram is becoming more active thanks to volunteer and former summer student Marla McKenna, and we use Twitter as well, with limited success.

REAL operates two Facebook groups and two Facebook pages. "Smiths Falls, REAL and Community Garden" and "Journey to Sustainable Living" are both groups, while "REAL Deal Store" and "REAL – Rideau Environmental Action League" are Facebook pages. The REAL Deal posts some valuable and unique items on Facebook Marketplace, which has become a very valuable and inexpensive marketing tool for us.

We continue to send occasional email messages as well as the newsletter to a mailing list via MailChimp. REAL also produced a printed bookmark to summarize REAL for the uninitiated, and hope to distribute it more widely when conditions allow. We were also recognized several times in the Smiths Falls Record News, and appreciate the opportunity to tell the public about what we do.

Another first for REAL was conducting our Annual General Meeting via zoom July 15. REAL members and friends logged on to hear highlights of the past year and tend to the usual AGM business.

THE REAL DEAL REUSE STORE

Sales and Donations. Ambitious sales targets made for the REAL Deal were seriously impacted by the March 18 – May 26 closure. However, once the store reopened in June sales bounced back quickly, and we came close to making our annual goal. Donations were strong as well, almost up until mid December. Many factors are at play, including a growing reputation, customers coming from further afield, accepting debit and credit cards, and receiving better quality donations than in the past. Facebook Marketplace has proved to be an effective and inexpensive tool for us, as has Google My Business and Yelp, and we are on some online lists of fun things to do in Smiths Falls.

COVID 19. Thanks to the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) we were able to keep paying our staff and did not have to lay anyone off. We have also benefited from the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA) and a small grant to cover some of our additional COVID related supplies. Extra COVID precautions have included an acrylic shield at the cash counter, a designated cash lineup for busy times, and hand sanitizer at the two entrances. Everyone must wear a mask in the store. Extra cleaning of the shopping baskets, washroom and frequently touched services is taking place. We are enabling cashless payments by removing the minimum debit amount, and accepting credit cards. We used a garage sized tent to store donations before handling them.

Staff. The REAL Deal received a wage subsidy from OnTrac to help us hire two placements, both of whom continue to work for us part time. We also hired three youth, two of them through Summer Jobs Canada. There were some changes in the yard staff, and we are still looking for a more permanent replacement. We also have two cashiers to cover store hours. Some volunteers have chosen to not return, or to work only on days the store is not open to reduce their potential exposure. We have gained some new volunteers over the course of the year who work in smalls. Dan Cunningham continues to supervise store operations. He reports directly to Board members Donna McKenna and Barb Hicks. REAL is truly fortunate to have such willing and committed staff.

END OF LIFE ELECTRONICS

The end-of –life electronics recycling continues to be a well-used feature of our operation. The materials are collected regularly by Redi Recycling in Petawawa, and from there are recycled at other Ontario locations. We collected and diverted 48 tonnes of electronic equipment this year. The Ontario Electronic Stewardship Program wrapped up at the end of 2020, and the program will now be managed by the Electronic Products Recycling Association (EPRA).



The REAL Deal received a Champion Award from Community Living Lanark County.



Hard to recycle materials accepted at REAL Deal:

- Outer milk bags
- Writing instruments
- Print and toner cartridges
- Batteries
- Christmas lights
- Scrap metal
- Coffee pods (soon to be discontinued)
- Coming: pill bottles and crayons



REAL relies on its terrific volunteers for so many tasks: from sorting smalls, to making phone calls, taking photos, gardening, organizing workshops, providing professional advice and whatever needs to be done. If you would like to be a part of the team, please get in touch. New volunteers are always welcome.

INVESTMENT READINESS PROGRAM (IRP)

REAL was fortunate to secure a grant through the Investment Readiness Program, administered locally by the Perth and District Community Foundation (PDCF). This federal funding is intended to help social enterprises get ready to take on future investments. REAL requested funding for a feasibility study to look into several potential business opportunities for the REAL Deal. Jonathan Wade of Social Delta, an Ottawa Firm specializing in Social Enterprise Consulting, has been looking into the viability of the possibilities specified as well as a few others. Part of the research including surveying 260 REAL Deal customers, which was carried out by 12 volunteers. The projects were narrowed down to two: offering eco-friendly products and rental of tools and other useful items. The funding will conclude with a business plan for one of these endeavours that will leave us in a better position to solicit funding or to even self-finance the new project.

THE YEAR AHEAD

Plans for the coming year are not finalized, and will be affected by any COVID restrictions in place. But here are some possibilities:

- A new REAL DEAL sign at William St.
- A Depave project (remove pavement from a site and replant)
- Phase 3 of the monarch garden, educational materials and tours
- More eco-friendly products available through the store
- Participating in a new federal energy efficiency rebate program
- Hiring summer staff to for garden and compost promotion
- Two Evergreen events to dedicate new commemorative stones
- More workshops by the Journey to Sustainability Team
- Supporting a local shoreline restoration project.
- More recruitment of board members and other volunteers.

OUR ENVIRONMENTAL FUTURE

If the environment of Lanark, Leeds and Grenville is important to you, please consider supporting REAL, your local environmental organization, with a 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.