

# REAL *update*

REAL people taking REAL action to protect our environment

Rideau Environmental Action League (REAL)

JULY 2021

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## Depave Leaves its Mark

REAL is pleased to have completed its first Depave project in downtown Smiths Falls.

REAL organized community volunteers to participate in removing by hand a 100 square metre section of Daniel Street in front of the Smiths Falls Public library on June 19. Then on July 3, volunteers planted two 25 square meter beds of primarily native plants within the same space.

Depave is a project of Green Communities Canada (GCC), an organization that represents organizations across Canada, including REAL, that are working to create more environmentally sustainable communities. GCC secured three years of funding through the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) for Depave projects, which made it possible for REAL to complete the Daniel St. Depave. Since 2012 about 60 Depave projects have taken place in about 20 Canadian communities and more are planned. [See more.](#)

By engaging community members in removing the pavement and the planning, we get people talking about the issues, create ownership, and show people that they can make a difference in their communities. Removing impervious surfaces helps restore the natural water cycle by allowing stormwater to infiltrate into the soil instead of running into storm sewers, lakes and rivers, picking up pollutants along the way. Revegetating the space makes it more beautiful and more livable, provides shade and cooling, and creates habitat for pollinators and other wildlife. We had a great crew of enthusiastic volunteers, including Mayor Pankow and most of the town council.



One of the four teams who volunteered to remove a section of Daniel Street on June 19. About one third of that block was removed by hand.



## Depave (continued)

Organizing the Depave in COVID times had its challenges, but the organizing team of Donna McKenna, Katie Hoffman, Barb Hicks and Dave Thornely managed to make it happen. The dates were uncertain and changed more than once due to COVID restrictions, and there was some uncertainty while the Town of Smiths Falls confirmed their funding for the entire Town Square project.

Many volunteers who had signed up to help were unavailable once the dates were finalized. On Depave day, we organized four shifts of six people so that we could keep to under 10 people congregating in an outdoor space, and everyone wore masks while working together. We were unable to have washroom access at either the library or the Welcome Centre, so a portable toilet was brought in.

REAL engaged Lashley and Associates to create the garden plan for the beds, but sourcing the specified plants was a challenge this year due to supply issues, and the increased public interest in gardening. Donna visited most of the area garden centres to collect the varieties, sizes and quantities of plants needed. We were fortunate to fill in some of the blanks by putting out a call for gardeners to contribute certain plants from their own gardens (see last page).



*Eight shrubs and 196 plants sourced from various local establishments as well as local gardeners waiting to be planted. Four native trees will be added in the fall.*



*The bed closest to the library about 10 days after planting. Eventually the area surrounding the beds will be grassed.*

We are grateful to the local media for their great coverage of the two work days: Hometown News, the Record News, Lake 88 and Cogeco Your TV. They managed to create a good buzz about Depave, and we had lot of positive and encouraging comments from the public.

The cooperation of the Town of Smiths Falls, particularly Director of Community Services, Art Manhire, was crucial to making this happen. Public Works removed the remaining two thirds of the pavement, put up the security fences, lent us wheelbarrows and tools, rented a portable toilet, removed the broken up pavement volunteers had piled up, brought in earth to fill up Daniel St. and helped mark and dig out the beds, and many other contributions. They even brought the mulch that we didn't use over to the REAL Deal for us.

There is much more to be done for the Town Square redevelopment. At the centre will be a bandshell funded by late Tom Foulkes, a loyal REAL supporter. New benches, pathways and lighting will be incorporated. REAL will be funding four additional native trees, which will be planted in the fall. It is going to look great!

REAL has a few remaining things to do to finish off, including installing a sign to commemorate the project, and completing our final report. Two videos were put together by AJ Photography and have been posted on [YouTube](#). Photos of the two work days are posted on [Facebook](#), and some photos of the whole process are [on our website](#).

**Prizes for Depave Volunteers**

As part of our agreement with GCC, all Depave participants and volunteers were asked to complete an online survey, so that GCC can continue to improve the program as well as demonstrate its effectiveness to the funder. So to encourage people to complete the survey promptly, we offered some eco-friendly prizes. The winners are below.

1<sup>st</sup> prize – Gloria Pavey  
a grey 220 L rainbarrel (value \$55)

2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> prize – Wendy Alford and Lauralee Merkley  
\$20 REAL Deal gift certificate

4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> prize – Alan Gerschwind and Joni Thornley  
a distinctive and sturdy REAL canvas tote bag designed by Marla McKenna (value \$7)

Please note that the canvas bags are available at the REAL Deal store cash if you would like to purchase one for \$7.



**COVID Doesn't Stop Rain Barrel Sale**

Our annual rain barrel truckload sale went ahead as planned, even though the store was not open at the time. We ordered in 240 barrels in all, which included 60 extras to have on hand throughout the summer. Customers were asked to order their barrel online at rainbarrel.ca. Unfortunately, the rain tanks and some of the more unusual barrel styles and colours sold out early. Sales were mostly the grey or terracotta 220L recycled food grade barrels, which cost \$55. New this year were ugly duckling barrels, which, in our shipment, were all grey. The “uglies” are functional but a little more beat up looking, which suits many people just fine. They cost \$35. When they are sold through the store, we charge GST on the purchase price.



The distribution took place outside the gated area, the volunteers wore masks, and with a five-hour window there were no lineups to contend with. All went smoothly, and was definitely more straightforward than the year before.

We still have about 25 barrels on hand to sell. They are in the back yard. The overflow hose will be in the barrel, and a kit containing a filter basket, t-connection, and tap/spigot will be provided at the cash. We also have a number of replacement parts available for \$5 each, but sorry, no hoses. REAL makes \$10 on every rain barrel sold. Barrels sold through the sale benefited our monarch garden, and the 60 extras count as REAL Deal sales. Either way, a great cause!

## Annual General Meeting July 14

REAL's AGM was held via zoom on July 14. Members and others on our email list should have received email notification, and the handful of "snail mail" members were mailed a paper invitation.

Malcolm Morris, Chief Administrative Officer for the Town of Smiths Falls since 2014, was our guest speaker. Malcolm was involved in creating a pilot blue box system in Kingston in 1989, and held many leadership roles with that city over his 21 years there. At our meeting he described the evolution of the blue box system, and how we arrived at the new system of Extended Producer Responsibility. The new system will be phased in, with Smiths Falls' transition date being July 21, 2023. The current blue box program costs the Town about \$210 K a year, and those costs will be assumed by the producers of the packaging materials.



We had a quick review of the year's REAL activities Feb. 1, 2020 to Jan. 31, 2021, which were described in the Annual Report members received in February 2021. Then Barb Hicks, Board member, went into more detail on some developments over the past few months, including the REAL Deal, the IRP and tool-

lending projects, the Journey to Sustainability (J2S) presentation series, the Greener Homes program, and finally, our recent Depave project. Attendees also got to see a short video of the Depave volunteers at work depaving and planting.

AGM business included a review of our financial position by Treasurer, Dave Thornley, and election of board members by Donna McKenna. Four board members: Donna McKenna, Peter Au, Karen Schecter and Barb Hicks were one year into their two year term, and did not required re-election. Katie Hoffman and Dave Thornley had just completed their terms and were unanimously elected for another two year term.

Our constitution allows for up to 12 board members. Any new members can be voted on to the board by the current board members at any time during the year. If

you are interested, please speak to anyone on the board about the process. There are a few steps involved to ensure it is a good fit all round.

If you were unable to attend the AGM, a recording of the meeting is [available here](#).

## Upcoming J2S Zooms

This team continues to plan educational zoom sessions for the public. Next up are sessions on River Appreciation and Wetland Appreciation, that will each be followed by a Voyageur Canoe tour.



The River Appreciation zoom is Tues, July 27. The associated Sat. July 31 tour will start near Old Sly's and proceed east. The Wetland Appreciation zoom is Wed. August 11, with the tour of the swale running Sunday August 22. If you are on our MailChimp list, watch your email; otherwise watch the website and Facebook for more details.

## Still Looking for Donated Tools

We continue to accept donations of used tools for our tool rental operation. We have received a number of items, including a chop saw, jig saw, cordless drill and circular saw since we started looking in the spring. Our wish list on the [website](#) has been updated. (Look under REAL Deal tab.)

If you are decluttering or downsizing, and have some gently used tools you would like to donate to this initiative, please contact Nancy or Bill Hamilton at

[Hambert099@gmail.com](mailto:Hambert099@gmail.com) or (613) 800 1938 to discuss.

They will also be happy to arrange pickup.



**REAL Deal News**

We were relieved to finally reopen the store on June 11, after having been closed for ten weeks. This was the third COVID-related shutdown for the REAL Deal. Dan, our Store Manager, was in the store two days a week, 10 – 2 to keep an eye on the store and to check phone, email and Facebook messages during the closure. But we were unable to accept donations or ewaste, and curbside pickup is not practical, given our diverse range of products. For the first week we were open we were limited to 15% of our capacity. Fortunately for us, it only happened once that we had to ask customers to wait outside until some other shoppers left, in order to keep to our limit.

As with the other closures, once we opened, sales bounced back to where they were before, and even exceeded our expectations. Thanks everyone for your terrific support of our store. And thank you, also, for hanging on to your donations while we were closed.

One exciting improvement over the shutdown was an installation of a new dual flush toilet. We've been meaning to purchase a more water-efficient toilet ever since we opened, and noticed one on sale so finally took the plunge (pun intended!)

The shutdown happened just as we were planning an art sale, so we have just started a 50% off wall art sale on June 21. Some is on the front table, and some will be outside on tables in good weather. Other pieces are still on the walls but are marked 50% off. Our upstairs storage area is bursting with framed art. If you are aware of another outlet for wall art, please



let us know, as we really want to get it to some person or organization that can make use of it.



*Our summer staff. At left, Jonathan Drummond in smalls. Bottom right, Alex Lumbers, who works in the yard. Bottom left, Daisy Maloney (left) who does 15 hours a week of garden tasks. Also shown is Aira Sarmiento (right), who started as a volunteer, and now works in the yard, as well as completing university courses.*



Summer Students. We were fortunate to receive funding from HRSDC for three students this summer. We are pleased to welcome Jonathan Drummond, who is working inside the store, doing mostly smalls, and Alex Lumbers, who is working outside in the yard and doing other outdoor tasks. Both are high school students. Daisy Maloney, who is also working on her high school credits, was hired to do 15 hours a week of gardening. The garden assistant position is new for REAL, as there is lots to do in terms of weeding, watering, planting, mulching, trimming and all the rest. Due to the store closure, the summer staff started a few weeks later than the funding allowed, but we are grateful to have Alex and Jonathan until school begins in September. In response to the employment situation created by COVID, this year the HRSDC program allowed for part time positions for a longer time period, so Daisy's garden position will extend into early October.

## Greener Homes and Home Energy Audits

The long-awaited Greener Homes program was launched May 27. Through this new federal program, up to 700,000 grants of up to \$5,000 will be awarded to help homeowners make energy efficiency retrofits to their homes. Pre and post energy retrofit evaluation are a requirement of grant eligibility. Up to \$600 for the audit cost will be refunded to homeowners who qualify for the incentives. The great thing about this program is that homeowners with any type of heating source qualify, incentives will be provided for heat pumps and solar PV systems, and the program is intended to run for seven years.

Alan Leonard, our Registered Energy Advisor, has been doing home energy audits for REAL since about 2008. Most recently, homeowners who heated with natural gas were able to take advantage of the incentives through Enbridge's "Home Efficiency Rebate (HER)" program. Many of the booked audits were delayed due to COVID restrictions. Although Ontario regulations made it legal for this kind of home service to take place, Enbridge themselves had asked that auditors not go into people's homes. The predictable result, of course, was a backlog of people wanting to start the process, or get their final audit in order to qualify for the grants. As a result, once Ontario opened up, Alan was busy finishing off previously booked audits, and was not booking any new ones.

However, due to a health issue, Alan will not be booking any new audits through the Greener Homes program for now, as it is unclear if and when he will be available. There has been a general scramble across the country to get auditors retrained, and to recruit new auditors to satisfy the demand. We are in discussions with a potential new auditor from Merrickville who will be able to serve the Lanark, Leeds and Grenville catchment area. One component of the Greener Homes program is to provide funding for training and recruitment of new auditors, particularly to include under-represented populations in the pool of auditors, and to accommodate under-served areas. Green Communities Canada is submitting an application to the program, but that will take some time.



*The federal Greener Homes incentive program was launched at the end of May. REAL is currently unable to schedule new home energy audits, and suggest using another Green Community.*

In the meantime, we encourage you to proceed if you are interested in taking part in Greener Homes. There are many service organizations out there. We, of course, recommend you try another Green Community member, such as Red Squirrel Conservation in Kingston or Envirocentre in Ottawa. GCC is in the business for environmental reasons, while some other operators out there are more profit-motivated. To access the greener homes program, homeowners must use an online portal, and start by [establishing an online account](#).

You should also know, if you are a natural gas customer and were working on taking advantage of the Enbridge incentives, that their program is still on, at least until the end of this year's contract. And because the two programs are not identical, there may be opportunities for "stacking", i.e. applying for incentives for upgrades through both programs, with the total potential incentive being about \$2,000 more. All the upgrades would need to be complete before having the final audit done. An additional charge to do the "paperwork" for each program would be payable to the auditor.

**In REAL Life**



**Evergreen Avenue.** An Evergreen Avenue commemorative event is being planned for Saturday, September 11. There are 22 stones to dedicate this year as last year's event was postponed a couple of times before being cancelled outright. Watch our website and your inbox for details as the dedication will be taking place before our next newsletter.



**Cleanups.** Pitch In Smiths Falls was a casualty of COVID again this year. We had planned to continue the annual litter cleanup by encouraging individuals and family bubbles to participate, but then the stay at home order kept getting extended, and we did not feel we should be encouraging people to leave their homes unnecessarily. There is always next year. We hope, however, to arrange a shoreline cleanup in the fall, tentatively the weekend after Thanksgiving. The water levels will be lower then, exposing more garbage, and making it safer to retrieve.



**Mushroom Compost.** We still have lots in our parking lot, across from the customer entrance. Trinity United Church brought in a load and bagged it for sale as a fundraiser. The price is now just \$5 a bag, with the proceeds going to the church. It makes a great soil additive to spread on your gardens at the end of the season.



**Monarch Garden.** Phase 1 and Phase 2 are looking great, and generate many compliments. The committee gets together periodically for tending the beds, and Daisy waters and tends them in between. A number of plants did not come up this year and needed to be replaced, and a few that did come up were just too tasty looking for the groundhogs, rabbits and deer to pass up. Co-chairs Donna McKenna and Marje Fletcher were busy with planning the Daniel St. gardens, so Phase 3 (closer to the Community Garden) has been put off, although the topsoil has been delivered should the inspiration (and energy) strike to at least shape the bed this fall. The plant labels will be back in place shortly.



The hydrangea tree was spectacular this year.



A view of REAL's Monarch Garden in mid July 2021.

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Smiths Falls ON  
K7A 5A5  
info@REALaction.ca

www.REALaction.ca

**REAL Deal Store &  
Environment Centre**

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

Open Wednesday  
through Saturdays  
10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

For inquiries about Home  
Energy Audits, see our  
website.

Find us on:  
Facebook, Twitter  
and Instagram

Send contributions to the  
September issue by August 31  
to dhicks11@cogeco.ca  
or call Barb at (613) 283-9966

**REAL people taking REAL action to protect our environment**

**Thanks to everyone for their donations and assistance!**

• To Ariel Sarmiento, Aira’s father, for donating a used lawnmower when the one the staff were using died. Thankfully, Chester is back to keeping our grass under control. Ariel has also helped us out with snowblower repair in the past.

• To Susan Pate for donating houseplants to the store. She has been repurposing containers from the store: tea cups, rose bowls, sugar bowls, crock pot inserts etc. and potting cuttings from her own very productive houseplants.

• To Harvesthyme Division of Fernlea Flowers for their donation of 200 vegetable and herb plants. The company regularly donates unsold plants to food banks and community gardens. Luckily two large AV carts had just been donated which made transporting them easy!

• To the gardeners who donated some harder to find plants for the “depave gardens”: Iris Allard, Kathy and Melissa Deutekom, Marje Fletcher, Donna McKenna, Sandra Garland from the Fletcher Wildlife Garden, Barb Vigus, and REAL’s own monarch garden. Sorry if we’ve missed your name. We had more offers of sedum than we could use, and hope to take a rain check on those.

• To Christy Melvyn who has volunteered to look after the depave gardens for the summer, which is a major undertaking. The hose, tap and sprinkler need to be kept elsewhere, so it would have been a difficult job to split amongst people. Thanks Christy, we know with your horticulture background it is in good hands!



*Smalls volunteer Nancy Andison with the donated herbs, tomatoes and assorted pepper plants.*

**Make a  
REAL  
Difference**

Please return this form to:  
REAL  
Box 1061  
Smiths Falls, ON  
K7A 5A5

Or bring to  
The REAL Deal

**Make a Donation**

I would like to make a donation of

\$ \_\_\_\_\_

A charitable receipt for income tax purposes will be issued. To donate by credit card, go to [www.Canadahelps.org](http://www.Canadahelps.org).

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I would like to become a member

Individual membership \$15

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