

# REAL

## *Annual Report*

**Feb. 1, 2021 to Jan. 31, 2022**

**Rideau Environmental Action League**

REAL people taking REAL action to protect our environment.

### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

REAL had a very successful year in 2021!

Several projects we normally do each year were not completed, primarily due to COVID, but what we did do turned out very well. Our Depave project involved members of our community plus REAL members and was a huge success. We turned Daniel Street into two butterfly gardens!

REAL opened a tool lending library in the late Fall in a corner of our store, and had 22 members by the end of the year. For \$45 per year residents can borrow any of the over 100 tools we have on hand.

Our the May rain barrel sale and our Fall Online Auction brought in funds which will allow us to carry on into 2022.

Plans for this year will be unfolding unless circumstances beyond our control interfere. We will not be deterred from our path.

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](http://www.REALaction.ca)

*Left: One of the four teams who volunteered to remove a section of Daniel Street on June 19. About one third of the pavement was removed by hand in REAL's first Depave project.*

## COVID AND REAL

COVID continues to be a factor in REAL's planning and activities. The REAL Deal Store did not open until February this year due to the second pandemic related lockdown in Ontario. Pitch In, the Evergreen Avenue dedication ceremony, and our fall local foods dinner were the casualties of the situation. We were unable to participate in any public events.

However, our Depave, Tool Library opening, rain barrel sale, fall shoreline cleanup and online auction all went ahead with modifications. The REAL Board continued to meet monthly by Zoom. Hopefully the situation will improve and open up more possibilities for our local environmental activities.



## MONARCH AND COMMUNITY GARDENS

Phase three of the Monarch garden was put on hold as the same group participated in the establishment of a downtown Depave garden. Phases 1 and 2 directly in front of the store continued to be maintained, and plantings were done around the base of an obelisk added late in the previous year. The garden attracted many visitors, many with cameras in hand to capture the butterfly activity. Aphids continued to be a problem, especially for the milkweed plants. Seeds were collected from many of the plants in the fall to be sold in the spring of 2022.

The twelve community garden plots were snapped up earlier in the season than usual, despite the fee increase to \$25. Thanks to staff, the grass was cut, the edges trimmed and the water barrels kept full so the participants could concentrate on growing their vegetables. Three groundhogs were removed from the premises. For some people their REAL plot was their only garden, and others were using it to supplement their home garden. A few gardeners did not follow through with their plans. Tomatoes in particular did really well this year. REAL also did some plantings and a volunteer experimented with potato towers and pumpkins. A path leading from the west side of the garden down to the parking lot was also added.

## Online Auction

Our second online auction was a financial success. By the time bidding closed November 13 the high bids totalled \$2,000 and we had also attracted over \$2000 in sponsorships from local businesses and other supporters. Some auction items were donated from the community, but most were gently used items set aside from REAL Deal donations over the past year. As intended in 2021, the auction was our way of recouping the money usually raised with our local foods dinner. The bidding was enthusiastic and the auction attracted new shoppers to the store as well.



*Two hundred and forty rain barrels helped local residents to conserve water and supported our monarch garden.*

## Rain Barrel Sales

Our third "truckload" rain barrel sale went very smoothly May 29th. In total we ordered 240 barrels, most of which were distributed that day, with 60 remaining to sell through the season at the REAL Deal yard for \$55. New this year was the addition of Trinity United Church members selling mushroom compost from our parking lot that same day, and some "ugly" rain barrels that sold for a discounted price. Proceeds from the barrels sold that day were directed to the monarch garden, while the others were considered REAL Deal sales.



## REAL Board of Directors

Katie Hoffman—President

Karen Schechter

—Vice President

Barb Hicks

—Secretary

Dave Thornley

—Treasurer

Donna McKenna

Peter Au

## Town Council Liaison

Niki Dwyer



*These canvas bags discourage the use of single use plastic bags and promote REAL.*

## Communications

REAL communicates with the community through our website, “REAL Update” newsletter and email notices to members. We maintain several Facebook pages: REAL, the REAL Deal Store, the Community Garden and Journey to Sustainability, as well as using Instagram. Local media including the EMC, Hometown News, Lake88 and the Humm are very supportive of our initiatives.

## DEPAVE PARADISE

In 2021 REAL completed its first Depave project in downtown Smiths Falls.

REAL organized community volunteers to remove 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 native plants within the same space.

Depave is a project of Green Communities Canada (GCC). This particular Depave was funded through the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF).

Engaging community members in the Depave shows people that they can make a difference in their communities. Removing impervious surfaces helps restore the natural water cycle, and revegetating beautifies the space.

Organizing the events in pandemic times had its challenges, as the dates were altered several times, and we had to arrange to have fewer than 10 people on site at any given time. Some of the plants were difficult to find, but we made good use of a variety of local establishments as well as plant donations from the community.

The cooperation of the Town of Smiths Falls, particularly Director of Community Services, Art Manhire, was crucial to the project’s success. The Town will be adding a bandshell, paths, benches and lighting in 2022, and REAL will be contributing four native trees to the space.

A sign explaining the project has been installed, and some great photos and videos of the project are available on our website.



*One of the two butterfly gardens planted during the Daniel St. Depave Paradise project, with the Smiths Falls Public Library in the background. Four native trees will be added in 2022.*

## Electronics Depot

As of Jan 1, 2021, the Electronic Products Recycling Association (EPRA) is managing the collection and recycling of electronics in Ontario. Residents can bring their out of date computers, televisions, stereo systems and any associated parts to the e-waste bin next to the REAL Deal. Donations continue to be very strong, and the bin needs to be emptied every one or two weeks. This year we collected 38.4 tonnes through this service and \$6,000.



*A look inside the e-waste bin, which is filled every one to two weeks with discarded electronics.*

## Other Waste

REAL collects other materials from the public for recycling. Customers can use the labeled bins just inside the store entrance.

- Outer milk bags
- Writing instruments
- Print and toner cartridges
- Batteries
- Christmas lights
- Scrap metal
- Pill bottles, crayons and glue sticks

## REAL DEAL REUSE STORE

Despite two Ontario shutdowns early in the year, the store did well when it was open. Customers quickly returned, and donations and sales were strong, although not as great as we had budgeted for. Our reputation continues to grow and customers come from outside the immediate area, especially on Saturdays. Various COVID safety measures remain in place.

By the end of the year we had taken in 34 tonnes of materials and served 763 buyers. Our sales were 82% of what we had predicted, likely due to the 12 weeks the store was closed.

We welcomed some new staff this year: Arnold Price in the yard and Brittany Geuer on cash. We hired three summer staff: Jonathon Drummond in smalls, Alex Lumbers in the yard, and the new part time gardening position was filled by Daisy Maloney and later in the season by Samantha Kuehl. Other regulars at the store are Heather Warren, Tiffany Carrol, Tim Dupras, Chester Tarkowski, Cole Forbes, and store manager Dan Cunningham. Once again it was an incredibly hot summer, and we thank the outdoor staff for bearing the brunt of that. Thanks to government grants, we were able to pay all staff throughout the shutdowns. Volunteers, particularly in smalls, are an important part of the equation.

We feel fortunate that the store continued to play an important part in the waste diversion in our community.



*A new REAL Deal sign was installed at William Street, with changeable blades to highlight other features of the Environment Centre. Here volunteer designer Bruce Fletcher and sign maker Andre Arcand install the sign in early October.*

## JOURNEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

The Journey to Sustainability (J2S) team continued to offer Zoom presentations throughout 2021. The year began with “Plastics in our Waterways”, a joint effort of J2S and the Rideau Roundtable and “Naturalizing our Shorelines”, both in March. Another session was directed at residents in the neighbourhood of a proposed shoreline restoration project. For Earth Day, April 22, the topic of Regenerative Farming was covered by three guest speakers, and in June the topic was creating a butterfly garden. July and August presentations were “River Appreciation” and “Wetland Appreciation”. A Montague farm was used as a regenerative farming example in September’s talk, and “Biochar and Climate Change” was the December topic. Recordings of most of these Zoom sessions are available on our website.



## REAL TOOL LIBRARY

REAL opened its tool lending library in October with a kickoff celebration. The tool library, located in a corner of the REAL Deal Store, will make tools available for the public to borrow with the purchase of a \$45 annual membership. Borrowers could be people who don't have the space for their own tools, cannot afford to purchase tools, or may only need the tool for a few uses.

The library started with a set of about 60 tools, which quickly grew to 100. Nancy and Bill Hamilton took on the task of acquiring, assessing and repairing the tools. Most were donated and a few were purchased used from other sources.

The tool library encourages the circular economy by promoting the use of used tools, reducing the possibility of tools going to landfill and reducing the need for homeowners to purchase new tools for short-term use. The feasibility study and business plan for the operation were funded by an Investment Readiness Program grant.

*Jake Wilson, Cleanup Co-ordinator, directing volunteers assembled to clean the shoreline by the Jasper Road boat launch*



## RIDEAU RIVER SHORELINE CLEANUP

A fall Rideau River Shoreline Cleanup attracted about 20 volunteers who retrieved 370 pounds of garbage from several local sites: the Bascule Bridge, Turtle Island, Lower Reach Park, behind Heritage House Museum, the boat launch near the intersection of Jasper and Eric Hutcheson Road, and on the other side of the river near the Edmonds Lock Station overflow dam.

The organizer, Jake Wilson, gave a presentation, "Plastics in our Waterways", a collaboration between REAL's Journey to Sustainability committee and the Rideau Roundtable, back in March. A similar presentation was given to the Rotary Club of Smiths Falls, and started the discussion about a potential cleanup.

This cleanup was a way for residents to contribute to addressing the plastics problem. A summary of the project was presented to Smiths Falls Council on November 15.

## Home Energy Audits

Our capacity for home energy audits required for the Enbridge, and later the Greener Homes rebate incentive programs, was limited due to COVID, auditor availability and glitches in NRCan's new system. We began the process to certify another auditor in the summer, and as of January 2022, John Appleby will be doing home audits in the K7A postal code, qualifying homeowners for NRCan's \$5,000 rebate for home energy retrofits.



*Niki Dwyer, Town Council Liaison; Katie Hoffman, REAL President; and Shawn Pankow, Mayor of Smiths Falls at Tool Library opening.*

## Evergreen Avenue

The team continues to maintain the shaded memorial walkway in Victoria Park and the native plants there. Twenty-two new memorial granite stones honouring veterans and community builders are ready for installation, but the dedication ceremony has been postponed several times due to COVID. The group is now aiming for June 2022.



### Volunteers Wanted

REAL welcomes volunteers to participate in many facets of our organization, from single events to ongoing involvement: gardening, taking photos, serving on the board, making deliveries, sorting donations at the store, and whatever needs to be done! If you have some spare time to help us make a difference in this community, please get in touch.

## OTHER COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

Radon meters are still available for lending to the community through two volunteers, and killawatt meters can be borrowed from the REAL Deal or most local libraries. Canvas tote bags promoting REAL, designed by Marla McKenna, are available at the store for \$7 each. These are a great if you are supporting the Lanark County plastic bag ban, as we are doing at the store. Our board agreed to support the Rideau St. Lawrence Regional Science Fair with a donation of prize money for top environmental projects. We make an annual donation to the Royal Canadian Legion also.

We have been unable to participate in public festivals and events this year, but hope to do so again in 2022.

## LOOKING AHEAD

All plans are subject to change, but here are some things we are working on for 2022:

- A spring event with rain barrel, composter, and mushroom compost sales, as well as the sale of butterfly themed items and seeds to benefit our monarch garden (May)
- Pitch In Smiths Falls and Shoreline Cleanup (late April)
- Evergreen dedication ceremony (June)
- More availability for home energy audits (eff. Jan 2022)
- Making an air quality monitor available to borrow.
- More Journey to Sustainability presentations
- Four native trees planted at Daniel St. Depave site
- More tree planting in the community
- Supporting the Rideau Roundtable's shoreline restoration at Turtle Island

## 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.