

# Annual Report

Feb. 1, 2023—Jan. 31, 2024



A new year brings a sense of fresh beginnings and opportunities. People set goals, reflect on the past, and look forward to personal growth. It's a time for optimism, but also a reminder that change is a constant part of life. Each new year holds the potential for new experiences and challenges.

The Rideau Environmental Action League believes that caring for the environment is crucial for the well-being of our planet and future generations. Small, sustainable actions collectively make a significant impact. Reduce, reuse, and recycle to minimize waste, conserve energy, and support eco-friendly initiatives. Every effort, no matter how small, contributes to a healthier and more sustainable world.

Katie Hoffman, President

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



## THE REAL DEAL REUSE STORE

The REAL Deal Store marked its 15<sup>th</sup> year at the 85 William St. location in 2023. We celebrated in August with refreshments, a 25% off sale for the week, and a quigong demonstration by Dr. Marina Quattrocchi.

**Sales and Donations.** The store continues to do well, and sales remained steady since 2022. It was an unusually slow spring; the economy and more options for people to sell their castoffs online are likely factors. The community has been very supportive with material donations. A number of businesses have made significant, regular donations, including windows from Healy's Glass, and lighting from Canarm. REAL Deal continues to attract new customers from across the region. Many of REAL Deal shoppers make regular stops at the store. Other residents stop by to donate recyclable materials such as batteries, pill bottle and milk bags.



**Staff.** We continue to operate with a mix of paid and volunteer staff. While the manager, cashiers and volunteers have been quite consistent over past years, the yard staff has been changeable this past year. We started the year with Arnold, Jim and Tim as our regulars, and for limited periods had Shawn, Marshall, Bill, Noah, Morgan and Joseph. Later in the year Andrew and Joel joined the staff, Tim moved on, and we rehired Matt. Chester continues to do four hours a day cleaning and electronics testing. Jon returned for a third summer in smalls, although we did not receive federal HRSDC funding for the hire. Heather and Bev are our cashiers, and Store Manager Dan Cunningham has been with us since the fall of 2019.

**Volunteers.** Regular volunteers include Donna, Margot, Pegi, Penny, Una, Julia, Lori, Nancy, Brenda and Barb. High school students Cynthia and Owyn are in the store as well. Shane accompanies Lanark Community Program clients Andrew, Kevin and Justin some mornings. Donna McKenna and Barb Hicks continue to oversee REAL Deal operation on behalf of the board.

**Developments.** This year has seen a revamp of our art area, and some signage directing customers to the yard. The REAL Deal has become a part of Pet Friendly Smith Falls. We had a Christmas dinner at the Smiths Falls Community Health Centre, the first time since 2019. Security challenges have lessened but still are a drain on resources. Even the weather can be a factor in our success. The yard staff continue to function in very wet, cold and hot conditions. Snow removal in the yard is very time consuming, and we have had some issues with the roof and trailer leaking. There have been some days, particularly in winter, that have kept donors and shoppers away, and a couple of times the store was closed early.

## Spring Garden Fundraiser

At our May rain barrel sale REAL distributed 78 rain barrels that had been preordered by area residents. We also arranged for a supply of perennials and native plants from Naturaide in Winchester, and sold seeds gathered from our gardens. The remaining Earth Machine composters we purchased in 2022 were available, too. Proceeds will be used for our monarch gardens. Trinity United Church sold mushroom compost from our property that day and throughout the summer. The REAL Deal sold an additional 75 barrels by late August, helping people conserve water and treat their gardens. Barrels had increased in price to \$65, but are still an excellent value, and many folks have discovered it is well worth having more than one.

## Electronics Recycling

The volume of used electronics collected has increased slightly, up to 30 tonnes, partly because we can now accept other electric items. Batteries and printer cartridges also go into that bin. This is a valuable service to the community, and earned us \$4500. Much of the volume is large screen TVs; console TVs and large computer monitors are donated less frequently now. Thanks to Redi Recycling of Petawawa for their efficient changeover of the bin when required.

## GREENING PROJECTS

**Monarch Gardens.** A faithful team of gardeners maintained the monarch gardens on the REAL Deal site, with several new volunteers joining the team. The forms for Phase 3 of the garden were built by Bill Hamilton next to the community garden plots. The gardens continue to attract a lot of visitors and positive comments, but it was not a great year for butterfly activity.

**Community Gardens.** REAL rents out twelve community garden plots at \$25 for the season. Staff looked after grass cutting and filling the water barrels, so gardeners could concentrate on planting, tending and harvesting their plots. The animal interference, particularly by ground-hogs, seems to have declined. Some of the boxes are showing their age; we will aim to repair

them in the spring.

**Compost Demo Site.** A three bin composter was completed at the compost demo site. We hired someone to ensure the composters are being used properly, and to find other sources of materials. A Composting 101 workshop was planned but cancelled due to low registration.

**Depave Gardens.** The monarch team also maintained the two gardens at Town Square, created as part of our Depave project in 2021. It was great to see the band pavilion at that location completed. The bandstand was funded by Tom Foulkes, a loyal REAL donor and supporter of many community causes in Smiths Falls. We are proud that our gardens have contributed to that community space.



## PITCH IN AND SHORELINE CLEANUPS

REAL followed last year's format of paying two young people to organize the April events. We were pleased with the turnout of volunteers from April 15 to 29 for the community litter cleanup. Shoreline cleanup day, Saturday April 29 was cold and rainy, but

attracted 14 volunteers who gathered 372 pounds of garbage. This year the group concentrated on sites near the Bascule Bridge, behind Heritage House, near Old Sly's lock and the boat launch near Jasper and Eric Hutcheson Road.



### Evergreen Avenue

Evergreen Avenue committee hosted a dedication ceremony in September to recognize four individuals: John Halpin, Clayton Holbrook, Jack Traynor and Hal Botham. Inscribed granite stones have been installed along the pathway in Victoria Park in their honour. As space along the walkway is limited, going forward only veterans and community builders will be recognized in this way.



### Fall Online Auction

Our third fall online auction raised over \$4,200. We reached our bidding goal of \$2023 three days into the ten day auction. A total of 155 items were on the block, many donated from the community, but mostly gently used items set aside at the REAL Deal. Bidding was enthusiastic, and many new shoppers were attracted to the store. Financial contributions through sponsorship came to \$850, a decrease from previous years.. We have already set aside some interesting items for next fall's event.

## OUT IN THE COMMUNITY

**Events.** Public events have returned post-COVID, and REAL was represented at many of them. In April we participated in the popular Sustainable North Grenville Sustainability Fair and EV Show in Kemptville, and on Earth Day were at the Carleton Place Environmental Action Committee fair, and at the Earth Day Celebration at Heritage House Museum. We provided some materials for Ecofest in Westport in June, and were at the Rideau Roundtable's Paddlefest at Lower Reach Park in July. We regularly take part the Friends of the Tay Watershed Discovery Day in Perth in August. We partnered with the Rideau Roundtable to offer a day voyageur wetlands awareness tours in August. In November we took part in the Town of Smiths Falls volunteer fair.



**Community.** The Journey to Sustainability team offered a zoom workshop on Fungal Dominant Compost in March. REAL contributed a Remembrance Day wreath in November, and contributed to the Rideau St. Lawrence District Science Fair. We continue to help out other non-profits with store merchandise if needed, including lending props to community theatre groups. Peter Au was chosen to be REAL's representative on the Town of Smiths Falls Climate Protection Working Group.

**Contributions.** We appreciate the major contributions of materials to the REAL Deal Store by Healey's Glass, the Perth Planing Mill, and Canarm Lighting. Carol Richardson of Heritage Arts donated the proceeds from a December upcycling workshop to the store.

## REAL TOOL LIBRARY

Business at our tool lending library has not taken off, but we remain committed to the concept. For a membership fee (\$25 for 6 months, \$45 for 12 months), members are able to borrow any of the library tools for one week at a time. We have made a few additions to our collection, and have close to 100 tools, Volunteer Jim McVeety comes in Friday mornings to ensure the tools are in good working order, and stay organized so that other REAL staff and volunteers can handle transactions at other times. We are looking for tool-savvy volunteers who would be interested in staffing the operation at other times of the week.



## TREES AT LOCAL SCHOOLS

REAL planted 30 trees at Smiths Falls schools in June 2023. We were pleased to have finally met this particular thirtieth anniversary goal. The six schools participating made their own selection from a suggested list of native trees. Thanks to Beth Sinclair for coordinating with the schools, and Craig Sinclair for leading the planting. Each planting session had a group of students participating, as well as a principal, teacher or school council representative, and a REAL board member. Craig ensured that the trees were watered over the summer before handing over their care to the individual schools in September. Thanks for Ryan Vander Meer of Green Acres for his assistance, and to Donna McKenna for spearheading the project for REAL.



### Home Energy Audits

REAL continued to offer the home energy assessments required for the HER+ energy incentive program operated by NRCan and Enbridge. John Appleby has stopped taking on new audits, and is finishing off the associated post retrofit audits. Alan Leonard began doing assessments again in the spring after a leave of absence. Together they did 110 home assessments. In January 2024 the federal government announced that the program will conclude four years ahead of schedule, saying funding is running out due to the programs' popularity. Homeowners are still welcome to pay for their own home energy assessments to better understand their home, and potentially reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by making strategic improvements.

### Mini Forest

Plans are underway to plant a Mini Forest at Corbett Park in 2024 in honour of REAL's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary. An enthusiastic team has come together and will start with a base layer in the spring, and dense planting in the fall.



### REAL Board of Directors

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

Smiths Falls Community Liaison Dawn Quinn

### 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.

## FINANCIAL

REAL is a registered Canadian charity, which enables us to issue tax receipts for financial donations, and to not charge HST on purchases of used goods. Every year we complete applications to nearby municipalities to receive community funding. In 2023 we received \$7,500 from the Town of Smiths Falls, \$1500 from Rideau Lakes, and \$500 from Montague. We receive no other core funding, but occasionally apply for grants for specific projects.

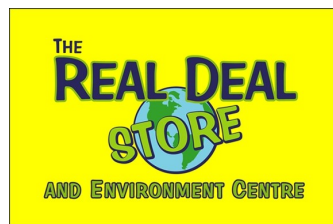
We hold one big fundraiser per year, currently our online auction, and this past year earned \$438 through a Customer Ask at Address’ YIG. Other income comes from membership and donations. Sales from the REAL Deal are used for REAL Deal expenses, primarily wages. We are very fortunate to have the use of the building thanks to the Town of Smiths Falls, without which the store would not be possible.

## 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 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.

## STAYING IN TOUCH



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