

Eden Mills Carbon Neutral Project launched

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The Eden Mills Community Hall was filled to capacity last Thursday for the launch of the village's project to "go carbon neutral" to help slow down climate change. Tim Laing emceed with coordinators Charles Simon and Libby Little speaking to the what, why and how.

Over 30 volunteers and corporate sponsors were on hand to help out and promote the message of reducing energy consumption, using clean, renewable power sources, and increasing the tree canopy. A warm reception followed, with vegetarian food donated by Guelph caterers Ouderkurt and Taylor, and local Wellington Ale donated by Philip Gosling. Coordinators Anna Simon and Glenn Little worked hard behind the scenes to bring it all together.

Charles Simon introduced the three-pronged concept of the project. The first prong is to reduce CO₂ production, or the "carbon footprint," through awareness and education. Participants can have their "carbon footprint" measured by fourth year Environmental Science students, under the guidance of Dr. Paul Sibley. The six students stood to introduce themselves.

Progress will be measured against this baseline. Ways to reduce this footprint will be identified and publicized. Ten simple steps are listed on the website (www.goingcarbonneutral.ca), such as using compact fluorescent bulbs and turning off lights and electronics when not in use. Simon pointed out that people will save money as well as reduce their footprint.

Representatives from companies such as EnWise Power Solutions were available to show people ways to achieve these goals. EnWise provides free home energy audits, installs efficient Energy Star products, from light bulbs to water heaters, and shows homeowners how to access government grants and incentives.

The second prong is to replace fossil fuels with renewable, "green" power, such as wind, solar or geothermal. Simon quoted the forward thinking inventor Thomas Edison: "I'd put my money on the sun and solar energy. What a source of power! I hope we don't have to wait until oil and coal run out before we tackle that."

Electricity retailer Bullfrog Power was on hand to answer questions about their company, which currently supports 20% wind and 80% low-impact-hydro sources. Ontario's current system mix is made up mostly of nuclear, coal, oil and gas sources, with less than 1% from wind and 2% from low-impact-hydro.

Representatives from Wellington Fireplace and Leisure were there to discuss available heating solutions that use biomass as fuel (wood or corn pellets).

The third prong is sequestering carbon by conserving and planting trees and other plants. They absorb CO₂ through photosynthesis, where they 'breathe' in CO₂ and 'exhale' oxygen. Dr. Andrew Gordon, a professor of Forest and Agricultural Sciences at University of Guelph, explained this process and demonstrated how much tree coverage is needed to absorb the CO₂ produced by one pick-up truck. His previous Chevy truck produced seven tonnes of CO₂ annually, compared to less than four tonnes from a Smart car. A small forest sequesters four tonnes of CO₂ per hectare per year.

He pointed out that planting trees is therefore not the solution, but every little bit helps. He said that short rotation wood crops, such as poplar trees, can produce the equivalent of 23 barrels of oil, using the equivalent of one barrel to do so, which is more efficient than producing fuel from corn.

Today's children will be living with the outcome of today's choices. To illustrate this, children from the village opened and closed the launch by singing "The Carbon Neutral Anthem", written by Linda Hendry. Environmental and social youth group leader Robin Bresnahan said, "We are all part of this web of life. What we do to one part, we do to ourselves. We young people did not create the problem, but we contribute to it with our everyday activities."

Libby Little showed a video featuring interviews with children about what global warming is, why it's important and what can be done. One child summed it up with "The environment helps people – food, water, everything. We wouldn't be alive without it, neither would other living creatures."

Another pointed out that he "kind of thought it was traditional to have snow at Christmas" and has seen more green than white Christmases. One predicted that they will need to buy oxygen tanks in the future to breathe. They suggested driving less, buying less stuff and cutting down fewer trees as solutions. They talked about solar heating, hybrid cars and turning down the thermostat in winter and up in summer, and to "Take down coal plants and put up windmills." They said that they are raised with habits and look to parents and teachers as examples.

One little boy said, "There is not much kids can do – adults don't really listen to me. If they'd listen, I'd tell them to get a big committee together and get help. Gather everyone in the village and move onto Rockwood and anybody we know." Little ended by saying, "We have gathered up everyone we know and are asking for your help."