

## Local action on global warming *Burlington neighbors tackle global warming*

By Barbara Leitenberg  
Free Press Correspondent

As the members of the EcoTeam filed into their last meeting, they were greeted by the sight of two luscious-looking homemade apple pies. "I made the pies because I think what we are doing is quintessentially American—like apple pie," said team leader Jean Markey-Duncan. "We have recognized a problem, and we are trying to do something about it."

In this case, the problem is global warming, and this group of Burlington New North End neighbors has pledged to be part of the solution. Their motto: "We can save the Earth one neighborhood at a time." After four monthly meetings, discussing material from David Gershon's book "Low Carbon Diet: A 30 Day Program to Lose 5,000 Pounds," the nine participating households estimate that they have shaved 92,525 pounds of carbon dioxide off their combined energy use. They have pledged to eliminate another 24,825 pounds. Each household does it differently from replacing incandescent light bulbs with compact fluorescents and planting trees to buying a fuel-efficient car, from using cold water for washing clothes and reducing time in the shower to keeping tires properly inflated and tuning up the furnace.

EcoTeam members always keep in mind that the typical American household generates about 55,000 pounds of carbon dioxide each year, while German households generate 27,000 pounds and Swedish households only 15,000 pounds. There is good news and bad news in these figures. Americans are a large part of the problem, but individuals can also be a large part of the solution, Markey-Duncan says.

EcoTeam member Sue Brooks, a retired bank manager, explains that she and her husband, Al, a retired engineer, were always proud of their efficient energy use, but now they see cutting back as a moral as well as an economic issue. "It's a question of the kind of world we are leaving for our children and grandchildren," Sue says. "At this point in my life, I'm questioning what I have contributed. I don't want to apologize for my time on Earth."

When the Brookses lowered their thermostats downstairs to 68 degrees and upstairs to 58 degrees, Sue found their first-floor living room a bit too cold for comfort. Her EcoTeam neighbors suggested that she close the bedroom doors upstairs to prevent the warmer air from rising. "It worked," Sue says. "Now 68 degrees downstairs feels fine."

Sue Brooks says Gershon's book and the group discussions heightened her awareness. She learned how to count the pounds of carbon she was using and how her actions reduced them. "Instead of feeling that global warming is a runaway train and I can't do anything about it, I feel more hopeful, empowered," she says. "I think we can make an enormous difference."

Besides the basic energy- and money-saving steps adopted by all EcoTeam members, some families have gone further. The Brookses and the Duncans know that airplanes are a huge source of carbon emissions. But since their children live thousands of miles away, they decided that they can cut down but will not give up air travel. Both families are making up for some of their airplane

carbon emissions by buying "carbon offsets," investing in companies that reduce emissions. Ron and Joy McGarvey have focused on energy savings for many years avoiding products with a lot of packaging, buying energy-efficient appliances but the EcoTeam process has encouraged them to do more. "We always said that when we need a new car, we'd get a hybrid," says Ron. "Now we have decided that we are not going to wait any longer."

Jean Markey-Duncan decided to be an EcoTeam leader after she saw Al Gore's film "An Inconvenient Truth" at the Burlington Unitarian Universalist Church. The presentation included remarks by Wes Sanders of Burlington, a retired theater director and vice chairman of Interfaith Power and Light, who encouraged people in the audience to take action by spreading the word through neighborhood EcoTeams.

"I hate running meetings," she says. "But I see this as a parenting issue, about caring for future generations." Markey-Duncan is no longer using her clothes dryer, hanging wet clothes in the basement instead. "I have made my peace with fluorescent bulbs," she says, acknowledging that the color warms up after a while. And she has gotten a Blower Door Test from the Burlington Electric Department, which checks your house for air leaks and makes recommendations for such

remedies as window stripping and attic insulation.

"I believe that we can turn global warming around," she says. "After all, who ever thought that we could get people to stop smoking?"

This neighborhood group approach to global warming grew out of Interfaith Power and Light's efforts to get Americans to change their energy spending habits, explains Wes Sanders. IPL is a project of a 20-year-old national faith-based organization devoted to deepening the connection between ecology and faith. "We were looking for a way to get people off the dime in making changes in their lives," Sanders says. "We needed something sustaining, beyond high-impact, one-time shots." The worldwide EcoTeam approach works well, he says, because people can share their wisdom, measure their successes and have fun. There are currently nine neighborhood EcoTeams in the Burlington area, some church-related, some not.

Sanders believes that older people are particularly well-suited to do something about global warming. "It's something we owe our children," he says. "We are responsible for the acceleration in the last several years, and we have the wisdom and, as retirees, the time to confront it, to claim our status as elders."

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## More information

\* EcoTeams: Contact Wes Sanders, 863-5708, 355-5278, wesandurt@verizon.net

\* "Low Carbon Diet: A 30 Day Program to Lose 5,000 Pounds" by David Gershon. Try your local book store or contact Vermont Interfaith Power and Light, 434-7307, info@vtipl.org, www.vtipl.org

\* Get technical and financial assistance to make your home energy efficient. Contact: Efficiency Vermont, (888) 921-5990, www.efficiencyvermont.com

Barbara Leitenberg writes bi-monthly about senior issues. For more information about services for elders, call the Champlain Valley Agency on Aging at (800) 642-5119.

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