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You might even be an activist


Kathryn Gemmell, Oceanside Star

Published: Monday, June 30, 2008

According to Elizabeth May, former executive director of the Sierra Club, environmental problems create activists. Activism occurs when ordinary people suddenly find themselves in a situation that requires a kind of moral heroism.

Unfortunately, labeling does our society a disservice by separating activists or conservationists from "ordinary people." For example, the media often describes environmental groups as "special interest groups." This clouds the difference between true special interest groups for profit, such as Chambers of Commerce, who seldom get labeled, and "environmentalists," who make sacrifices in both time and personal expenses working to ensure the common good.

Activism is democracy at work. In a healthy democracy, ideally all citizens would become activists at some time in their lives. Fortunately, with unprecedented challenges facing us locally and globally, ordinary citizens are stepping up to the plate to facilitate a shift in thinking by taking action. Consider the communities in Transition Towns (<http://transitiontowns.org>).

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Transition Towns are working together proactively to consider ways in which they can adapt to Climate Change and Peak Oil, two threats that are about to significantly affect us all. They are asking the question: "For all those aspects of life that this community needs in order to sustain itself and thrive, how do we significantly increase resilience (to mitigate the effects of Peak Oil) and drastically reduce carbon emissions (to mitigate the effects of Climate Change)?"

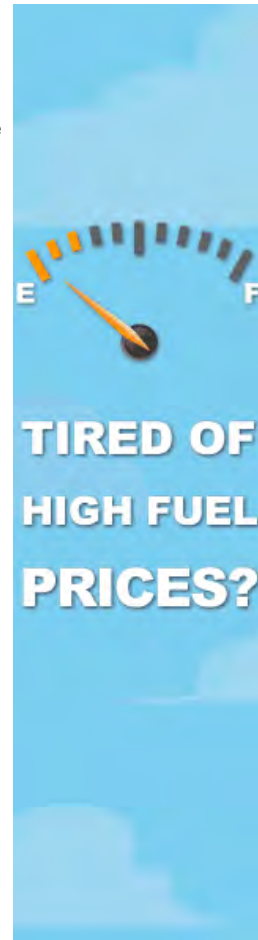
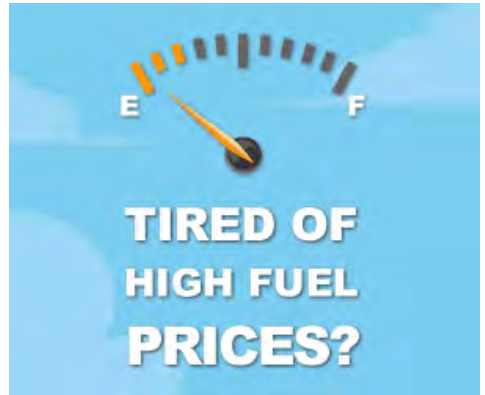
In order to answer those questions, they recognize two important points:
1) that we used significant amounts of ingenuity and creativity on the way up the fossil fuel curve and we can do the same on the descent, and
2) by preparing for the changes now, the odds are good that we'll have a lifestyle that's "significantly more connected, more vibrant and more in touch with our environment than the oil-addicted treadmill that we find ourselves on today."

The resulting effort by community activists invested in the welfare of their communities – ordinary people such as you and me – is leading to community-designed energy descent pathways that deal with the issues of Peak Oil and Climate Change.

Even within Oceanside, local citizens, not necessarily part of organized groups, are quietly and consciously trying to effect positive change for the common good. These individuals are choosing to reduce their impact on the planet and opting for a lifestyle not dictated by the dollar alone.

One such fellow is Robert Russell. Robert is in his early forties and lives and works in Parksville at Island Cycle. He grew up on lighthouses off the west coast of Vancouver Island. When his parents retired in Oceanside about 10 years ago, he followed them to the region.

Once here, he was attracted to the area's small-town, sleepy nature and its relaxed lifestyle. Since the early Nineties, however, he has witnessed tremendous growth in the local population and along with it an overwhelming addiction to a "s/he who dies with the most things, wins" lifestyle.



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Robert has no mortgage, no credit card and it's associated debt, he rides a bicycle as his main form of transportation, lives within walking distance of his workplace, has never owned a car and hates to throw anything away.

Some people might consider Robert radical; however more and more young people, facing a world of uncertainty -- a legacy from the previous generation -- are choosing to live such a frugal lifestyle. Robert cares enough to encourage a transition to a less fuel-dependent economy and leads by example. But Robert doesn't stop there.

Last year he helped a local disabled woman by converting a two-wheeled bike into a tricycle, which provides more stability. He will be adding an electric motor to assist her in climbing up hills and covering longer distances. She was delighted with his endeavors and today can be seen around town with his creation.

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calling 250-248-0647.

Kathryn Gemmell can be reached at kgemmell@qualicuminstitute.ca

Robert believes that this prototype would be great for seniors who want to be part of the transportation solution. And he's willing to build more of these bikes for anyone wanting to embrace a different way of thinking for the common good.

That, to me, is the sign of a true activist. You can contact Robert at Island Cycle by

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