



Mid-Island Co-op 7th Annual Green Solutions Trade Show & Speakers Forum

It's ~~Not~~ Easy Being Green

by David Morrison

Four years ago I wrote an article about Nanaimo Recycling Exchange (NRE) for another local publication. It was my choice to pen it, the motivation being how impressed I was that when dropping off my recyclables at any time on any given day, the facility was invariably teeming with folks doing likewise. I interviewed NRE Executive Director, Michael Schellinck, for the article; he estimated around 700 vehicles were passing through every day back then. So, it was, and remains, greatly encouraging that so many people in this region have embraced this particular way of "Living Green" as a matter of routine.

But there are two sides to every story. While NRE is one hub of positive energy for the good of our immediate environment, there are always those who could care less for it. Since moving to Vancouver Island in 2006 I have been shocked to witness more wanton acts of littering than could be expected

in any society, let alone somewhere as seemingly 'civilized' as this part of the world. To this end, then, there is still much work to do, plenty by way of education to get as many as possible thinking and acting responsibly green in their daily lives. It will take some time, maybe a generation or two, but such attitudes will surely become hardwired one day.

This is why events such as the Mid-Island Co-op 7th Annual Green Solutions Trade Show & Speakers Forum are so important. While aimed mainly at those of us already possessed of and committed to principles of green living, I believe that even a passing awareness amongst those yet to catch on that these events take place can be quietly persuasive in a positive direction.

To be held at Beban Park Social Centre in Nanaimo on March 17 and 18, (for convenience, let's call it) 'GS7' is free to the general public and, amongst other aims, will

offer "practical solutions to a sustainable future" and present "a wide variety of products for consumers to reduce their carbon footprint." People already of a green disposition are in for a treat, with a plethora of exciting, ingenious green products and a full program of fascinating talks to look forward to. (Indeed, Michael Schellinck will be in attendance at 1:00pm on 17th to pose the question, "Recycling, Is It Worth It?" My guess at the answer is 'Yes!') And for the currently uncommitted or merely curious there should be enough of fascination to at least provoke a few key lifestyle changes.

I spoke recently with fellow freelance writer and GS7 coordinator, Laurie Jones, about what to expect of the show, like who would be exhibiting, if attendees could expect to

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see any new green innovations showcased, and so forth. The first good news is that for the first time, as far as exhibitors goes, the event will be sold out when the doors open to the public.

“Yes, we are pretty close to being sold out this year, with 67 booths,” says Jones. “When I came onboard three years ago we only had 42 booths. We asked for feedback and the main comment from the exhibitors who were at that show was that they were pleased with the show, but it should be bigger. We heeded that call and increased the size.”

This expansion includes a new two-day format for the first time, as sure a sign as is needed that demand for exhibition space is at an all-time high. Consequently Jones sees a tangible buzz in the area for 2012's event and is excited about the range of products and services that eco-minded businesses will be bringing to the Beban Park Social Centre.

As she explains: “The variety of booths this year includes Cold Fire (coldfirecanada.com), a company that uses soy products for fire suppression; Cleaner Planet Soap Nuts (cleanerplanet.ca), an actual nut that you use in your washing machine; Economic Development Cowichan, with green products from the Cowichan Valley; and Go Green Cowichan, a consortium of companies who are promoting a green lifestyle. We've got some companies from Vancouver – Centra Windows (centrawindows.com), for instance. The City of Nanaimo and Regional District will be back for a second year, as they have their Green Box program, and will be promoting that. Then there are a couple of young guys who have started a hydroponic gardening company called Word of Mouth Hydroponics (wordofmouthhydroponics.com), and they're very excited about the display they're putting together. We even have Cedar Valley Memorial (Gardens Cemetery & Cremation Centre: cedarvalleymemorial.ca) talking about how to have green funerals!”

With the potential for hundreds of what could be termed ‘pre-qualified’ consumers passing through the doors, a trade show like GS7 would be an ideal opportunity for exhibitors to launch a new product, perhaps even as a prototype or blueprint to gauge interest and commercial viability. I asked Jones if she was aware of any exciting green innovations to be unveiled at the show this year.

“I don't know if any new products will be launched at the show,” she tells me, “but there will definitely be a lot of products that are not forefront in the consumers' knowledge base, so it certainly is a show where people can go and learn in many ways.”

Learning, educating oneself and subsequently sharing the knowledge, is certainly paramount at keenly environmentally-focused events like GS7. As I said in opening, as incredible as it is there are a great many people in our communities for whom environmental responsibility and/or concerns mean little-to-nothing. Before we are all neck deep in garbage and have befouled our planet in any way it is possible to do so, every chance to educate must be pounced upon. And that means starting with the young ones. To this end, Jones informs me of an excellent initiative being introduced at GS7.

“Brand new for this year, the stage is being set up for the Eco Kids Zone,” she reveals. “The activities will be such as building stuff that is eco-oriented, and we'll have the founder of Growing Young Farmers (friendlyorganics.ca), David Friend, from Victoria; he's known as Mr. Organic. The Growing Young Farmers program is teaching kids about food sustainability

and just being enthusiastic about growing vegetables and the benefits of being able to do that stuff yourself. This component will add a whole new dynamic to the show, and we are very excited about it.”

What a marvelous idea! Parents leave their little ones in the Eco Kids Zone to learn and create, as they explore the show to investigate products or services that may ultimately help to enhance their offspring's future. Then the children they collect from the Eco Kids Zone later on will be wiser young souls as a consequence of their time there. In terms of the overarching aims of GS7, it is just about the perfect scenario! And, as an aside, do you know what else is perfect about the 2012 Green Solutions show? It's happening on St. Patrick's Day – the ‘greenest’ day of any year!

For more information about the Mid-Island Co-op 7th Annual Green Solutions Trade Show and Speakers Forum, please visit www.midisland.coop or call Mid-Island Co-op Community Relations Officer, Susan Urban, on (250) 729 8413.

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