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A Decade of Progress

"One day, do you think we'll wake up in a world on its way to getting better? And if so, can you tell me how?" – 'Dive In' by Dave Matthews

Not so long ago the word 'environmentalist' conjured up notions of tree huggers chaining themselves to redwoods in old growth forests, or Greenpeace militants scaling the sides of oil rigs in the North Sea. These environmentalists were forerunners, and though severe, they played an important role in moving forward the environmental movement. However, environmentalism over the past decade has been characterized by a striking transformation to the mainstream, so that it now has a place in the kitchens of average citizens from every demographic cross-section of society.

Here in Fredericton, it came into our kitchen too. It moved into our neighbourhood, and onto our street, it got neighbours talking, it raised awareness, changed lifestyles, caused discontent with the status quo, and took root at City Hall. It pushes us to be better, and less wasteful, and more efficient in how we use Earth's bounty. To be sure, it has also caused the clash of horns in various circles. But that too is the welcome sound of a community without environmental apathy.

Now, as we enter 2010, it seems fitting to look back at what our community has been toiling on and achieving this past decade.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHGs) Reduction. Fredericton's commitment to environmental stewardship took root over a decade ago and has been growing ever since. In 2000, well before GHGs was an acronym in the public vernacular, the City of Fredericton signed on as a member of a worldwide movement of municipalities called 'Partners for Climate Protection'. In doing so the City made a commitment to reduce its GHG emissions by 20 percent by 2010 (over 2000 levels). In the last decade the City moved aggressively forward to achieve this goal by implementing a wide range of initiatives such as: energy retrofit of buildings, switching street and traffic lights to energy efficient technologies; and implementing anti-idling and gas reduction policies, amongst many others. The sum of these policies and actions has reduced the City's emissions by over 17 percent up to 2008. This result is well on track to achieve the 20 percent reduction by the end of 2010. On top of that, the City's progress toward its goal has made it a leader in the country in reducing emissions.

Informed and Engaged Citizens. What has changed in the last decade in Fredericton is the form and function of the environmentalist. Over the past ten years we have moved from environmentalism being the exclusive club of hardcore activists to a much larger community of everyday environmentalists. They are not perfect, not necessarily hardcore, but they are changing their lives in small and large ways

each day, and often influencing others to do the same. Most importantly, they leave open the door for compromise. They know it is impossible to kick a bad habit by throwing it out the window. They know that the better approach is to lead it down the stairs one step at a time till it reaches the door.

Fredericton's *Green Matters* environmental public outreach program (www.greenmattersfredericton.com) began in 2007 to educate, motivate, and support citizens in reducing their greenhouse gas emissions in an effort to reach the Kyoto Protocol community target of a 6 percent reduction in GHGs by 2010. This target is well within reach, and now the program has been broadened to promote and celebrate the overarching principles and practices of community environmental stewardship and sustainability. The City believes the long-term key to its vision of a cohesive community, vibrant economy, continued advancement and development, and engaged citizens is rooted in principles of smart and sustainable growth as Fredericton continues to grow and thrive.

Green Business. Environmentalism entered the 2000s with a reputation for being anti-jobs and anti-growth, but it's leaving the decade waving its pro-prosperity flag high. There is resounding support from every angle of the business world contending that a healthier climate means a healthier economy.

There is strong evidence that the Fredericton business community believes this too. The made-in-Fredericton *Green Shops* program (www.greenshopsfredericton.com) is proof. It began just over a year ago and already has upwards of 70 member businesses. The program continues to grow and evolve with feedback provided by businesses and business groups. And members continue to take innovative actions to reduce reliance on fuel and energy, water, supplies, and the like, while lowering their operating costs and attracting a loyal and growing following of customers who value environmental stewardship equally with value for money.

For the past two years in this New Year's column I pose the question "Would you change?". Well, maybe we can now take pride in the fact that we have changed some, and we continue to change, as citizens and as a community. And over this past decade the focus of this change has broadened beyond greenhouse gas reduction and climate change, to the very core of how we live and consume. Existing on this planet in a more sustainable way, and reducing our footprint here, touches upon every aspect of life - environmental, economic and social.

In this advancing global age, we acutely recognize that as citizens of a planet, on which the human population is growing exponentially, that we have a moral obligation to use less now, when we have the choice - be it energy, water, food, or other natural resources. Even the die-hard anti-global warming camp would be hard pressed to come up with an argument for using more, particularly as we stare into the future and consider increasing shortages and escalating costs for most everything we consume. So perhaps, even putting climate change aside, we can find common ground in this next decade.

In that spirit, may 2010 and the coming decade be one of taking stock of what we have and what we need, versus what we want. Our environment did not become compromised in a year or two or ten; it was a long period of inattention to the very core of what sustains us as a global human society. So then, reversing all of the negative actions and outcomes at once is not realistic, it will take time. This decade's environmentalists are practical - they know they cannot change the mistakes and shortcomings

piled up over the centuries with the snap of fingers. They know the world will end some day but not necessarily this Sunday. So we still have time. And when people have time, they can rearrange their priorities and reorganize their lifestyles in an orderly and lasting way.

So take the time you need this year to shift your life onto a more sustainable track. There is one thing I can guarantee you – you will not be disappointed that you did as the next decade unfolds.

The Green Matters team wishes you a New Year bountiful in everything that matters.

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