

Green Acton hits one year mark

By Ann Sussman

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One year ago, on May 20, 2008, 15 Acton residents got together to form a broad-based green group that would look at all kinds of environmental issues and figure out new ways of tackling them. High energy prices, concerns about climate change and unsustainable resource use made the idea seem appropriate.

Now, 13 months later, that idea has evolved into Green Acton, a grass-roots group and website (greenacton.org) that's open to everyone, spurred on a number of local green initiatives and been more successful than anyone could have hoped to imagine, (at least that's how it seems to me, one of the early instigators.)

The idea of a green umbrella group for Acton "was so ready," says Jim Snyder-Grant, an early initiator explaining Green Acton's success. "There are a lot of people interested in contributing."

"What's great about it was whenever we needed to get something done, someone appeared to do it," he said.

Early Green Acton contributors have had strong links to the schools which quickly helped extend Green Acton's reach. They include Kate Crosby, who helped the Town of Acton get its first solar panel array before Green Acton was around in 2007 (now on the football hot dog stand) and Karen Herther, co-chair with John Petersen of the Acton-Boxborough PIP (Parent Involvement Project), which offers math, science and technology enrichment programs for students K-12 and families.

"I was inspired personally (to join) because I work in the area of green and organic marketing," says Karen, who also runs Marketing Dynamics, a health and wellness-focused marketing firm. "I believe in walking the walk and saw Green Acton as a place to make a difference locally."

"It's surprising how enthusiastic people are and how we have new members every week," added Sue Cudmore, another Green Acton member.

When she mentioned she was interested in studying ways to reduce trash generated at a local elementary school this spring she found six other volunteers willing to meet at her house to discuss it further. "I didn't intend to even work on it that much," Sue said. "But all of a sudden there was a groundswell of people wanting to talk about it."

Green Acton's also benefited by reaching out to neighboring communities for inspiration and advice – and generating trust and more connections. "Green Acton is good at getting things done!" says Becky Busby a member of the Boxborough Energy Committee and frequent Green Acton attendee. "They truly appreciate the value of mutual support – they're willing to share information and are very generous with their time."

In the past year, Green Acton sometimes has initiated projects, sometimes contributing momentum to ones underway. A quick overview of its projects includes:

- Helping launch the Green Advisory Board (GAB), Acton's first governmental group tasked with looking at improving energy efficiency and helping to develop renewable energy policy for both Town and Schools.
- Creating the website greenacton.org, focusing on a broad range of local "green" issues, including links to other resources in neighboring towns; the website creation, (designed by Acton-based acanthi.com) was supported by a grant from the Mass Technology Collaborative and is designed to make green news easy to receive, as is a new Green Acton google-based discussion list.

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- Providing a candidates' forum, before April 2009 Town Meeting, where environmental issues could come to the fore; one candidate for School Committee and two for Selectmen presented.
- Supporting Earth Hour, with Acton-Boxborough PIP, on March 28, 2009, this one hour local and global event (Acton was first in New England to sign up!) encouraged participants to turn off lights for an hour and got people thinking about reducing our carbon-footprint.
- Launching the first ever Acton Green Energy Fair on May 17, 2009, with Acton-Boxborough PIP and The Discovery Museums; this featured more than 25 exhibitors plus the chance to check out biodiesel, speak to solar panel installers and eat s'mores baked in a solar oven. Platinum sponsors of the event included The Office of Michael Rosenfeld, Bursaw Oil & Gas, Acton Toyota of Littleton and Dunkin' Donuts of Acton.
- Building Town support for the global 350 campaign (350.org) to reduce average global level of CO2 in the atmosphere to 350 parts per million; this campaign urges leaders to make 350 a goal in upcoming climate treaty negotiations in Copenhagen this December. Green Acton secured the endorsement of the Acton Selectmen to write a muscular letter to President Obama and other leaders about the issue (see greenacton.org/350).
- Providing public support and spreading the word on the new Acton-Boxborough Farmers' Market, starting on Pearl Street in West Acton this July (July 12 to Nov. 1). It will feature locally grown produce, specialty goods, and music, art, a place for community groups to self-promote and kids' activities.

Green Acton has more projects in the pipeline for the fall including perhaps starting a 'swap' meet at the Transfer Station, participating in the 350 initiative's International Day of Climate Action, Oct. 24, as well as incorporating as a non-profit to further fund-raising ability. Come be a part of it. We welcome newcomers at our meetings the second Tuesdays of the Month (go to our website for meeting location; no meeting in August.) Please write us at info@greenacton.org to get involved or join the Green Acton E-loop and/or check out greenacton.org.

"What's compelling about Green Acton is its dynamism," said member Debra Simes. "The group brings a lot to the table: many kinds of people, a spectrum of 'green' interests, crazy amounts of enthusiasm, and an impressive range of skills. It makes for terrific learning for members and for citizens, informed action on specific issues, and endless opportunities to plug in and move our community in a more sustainable direction."

Ann Sussman is a founding member of Green Acton.