

Green bin success puts Newmarket on top

Newmarket

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Environment has friend in York's northern municipalities

By: Joan Ransberry

And the winner is ... the green bin program.

Of all the green initiatives across the northern part of York Region in 2007, the organic waste program stands out from the rest.

Facts speak for themselves.

With a whopping 74-per-cent participation rate, Newmarket not only takes the prize in the green bin program across York Region, it'll rate a spot on the world environmental stage if the usage rate goes up even further in 2008.

"Our diversion rate is not only the highest in the region, but perhaps it leads in Canada and possibly the world," a proud Newmarket Mayor Tony Van Bynen said.

Organic waste diversion rates for neighbouring northern municipalities range from 60 to 70 per cent, suggesting local residents do, indeed, want to be part of reducing the amount of garbage in landfill sites.

Throughout the year, the environment has had a friend in Newmarket, Aurora, King Township, East Gwillimbury and King Township on many counts.

Newmarket's got Lucy the Lady Bug spreading the go natural word, squiggly light bulbs landing on porches across town, smart cars hitting the streets, pesticide-free lawns, a law to keep the axe away from trees and 34 of the country's greenest of green houses.

Promoting the concept of a pesticide-free town, Lucy the Lady Bug logo is printed on town material in readiness for Newmarket's pesticide-free bylaw that comes into play in September. Lucy is offering tips on how to maintain a lovely lawn without the use of chemicals.

Early in December, volunteers with the Porchlight — Change Within Reach project delivered compact fluorescent light bulbs to 5,500 homes in Newmarket.

"If every household in Canada switched just one bulb, the reduction in pollution would be equivalent of moving 66,000 cars from the road," Mr. Van Bynen said.

While Newmarket's mayor drives a hybrid vehicle, a Smart Car is out and about promoting idle-free motoring.

In fact, Newmarket passed the most aggressive anti-idling bylaw of its kind in Ontario.

"The bylaw requires motorists to turn their engine off if parked for more than two consecutive minutes," Mr. Van Bynen said.

A recent ground-breaking ceremony launched Eco Logic, Canada's greenest subdivision.

Located just south of the Magna Centre off of Mulock Drive, the 34 eco-homes will go on sale this

spring. Energy efficient to such a degree, the houses will exceed environmental targets, including a 25-per-cent reduction in household water draws and a 60-per-cent reduction in water discharge flows, solid waste, greenhouse gas production and energy consumption, builders Rodeo Fine Homes officials point out.

One thing is certain: Vince Naccarato, co-owner of Rodeo Fine Homes, is thinking ahead.

"We are building greener for our kids, our customers and for their kids," Mr. Naccarota said.

"We are not just trying to build Canada's greenest homes. We're trying to enable a green community to develop around these homes."

Mr. Naccarato's partner, Frank Mauro, is also on side.

"We want to support our homebuyers to create a greener community that is a model for North America," Mr. Mauro said.

When Newmarket sold the eco-home development, no one smiled wider than Mr. Van Bynen.

"This is a project of national significance," the mayor said.

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With the environment on her radar screen, King Township Mayor Margaret Black has a plan.

"My goal is to make King the greenest community in Canada," Mrs. Black said.

"King Township is walking the green talk. We've got our green belt and farm lands, 25 per cent of forest cover, 70 per cent Oak Ridges Moraine and a history as an environmental leader as already green and we're striving to be even greener."

Ask King's mayor for a 2007 green initiative list and she'll comply on the spot.

Items marked "done" on King's 2007 going-green list include:

- planting 500 trees
- selling back yard composters
- encouraging use of environmentally friendly products such as cleaning products, solar-powered signs, efficiency light bulbs and recycled material in all municipal-owned buildings
- giving away large bags of free mulch
- having the 2006 waste diversion rate jump from 32 per cent to 60 per cent after the spring start-up of the green-bin program
- give township's planning department has its marching orders to think and act green

"The Township of King has always been an environmental leader and we will continue to take this lead," Mrs. Black said. "One has to only drive through our municipal to see how beautiful and green it is."

Aurora is also turning green. The top environmental initiative is Mayor Phyllis Morris' relentless drive to stop builders and condominium association from banning the old-fashioned clothesline.

The mayor's right-to-dry movement has spread Canadawide and caught the attention of former United States vice-president and environmental activist Al Gore when he was visited Toronto.

In late November, Mrs. Morris passed the laundry baton to Ontario's chief energy conservation

officer Peter Love who's now calling on Premier Dalton McGuinty to give total freedom to the clothesline.

In its efforts to reduce energy use in 2007, Aurora council gave the nod for the purchase of power for the town hall through BullfrogPower, enabling the municipality to support locally generated renewable power, said Kristen Yemm-Brodie, Aurora's co-ordinator of communications and marketing.

On the environmental front, 2007 was a busy year for East Gwillimbury - recycling containers were put in all parks and town-owned facilities, a summer dress code was put in place to reduce the need for air conditioning and East Gwillimbury's first annual townwide Litter Clean-up Day was a big hit.

Because the town adopted a hybrid-fleet policy, all light-duty vehicles purchased by the municipality must be gas-saving hybrids.

Mid-way through the year, East Gwillimbury received a national sustainable award for its new home policies, while at a recent Green Living conference, Premier Dalton McGuinty recognized the northern municipality as a leader in caring about the environment.

When East Gwillimbury Councillor Marlene Johnston embraced the Switch Out program, she took the lead to get the town to govern the disposal of mercury switches in automotive salvage yards. It worked.

"Although the (mercury) switch is very tiny, the impact on the environment is huge," town spokesperson Janel Zahorodny said. "One gram of mercury can contaminate a 20-acre lake for one year if improperly disposed."