

Earth Day. Great idea; strange concept. It wasn't that long ago in our young country and throughout the world that all indigenous peoples cared for the earth because they understood their dependence on it. That is where, I think, the difference between then and now, them and us, resides. Not enough of us keep in mind that we, too, are dependent on the earth. We always will be. Too many of us have forgotten that fact and too many of us think nothing of trashing the place.

We are already experiencing the results of people's ignorance and disrespect of the earth. Poisoned aquifers, clusters of cancer surrounding dump sites, landfills filled to the brim with stuff that could have been used or fixed but we were too lazy to take the time for that and the very climate itself changing because of our careless actions are but a few of the consequences and they are accumulating at an alarming rate. We are at a threshold; a time that will be noted in the history books. We made a difference or we were too late. What will the books say about us?

It only takes a few to step forward and influence many. More follow their example and, in time, behaviors that were once unusual, become the norm.

A few decades ago, the recycler and the organic farmer were the exception. Now reduce, reuse, recycle, buy local – buy fresh, build green, use green cleaners are every day buzz-words. Talk is a good thing. It helps to spread the word. It is part of the influence. But talking about going green and saving the earth is not enough. We need action.

A little more than a year ago I began to take a closer look at recycling and keeping hazardous waste out of the waste stream because I had to. Halifax was facing a fine of \$12,000 for having an uncapped landfill but they accepted the Town's proposal to for some projects in lieu of the fine. In my travels about the Silver Lake School District, I met with a spectrum of responses but many people were happy to get involved and some people already were. I'd like to tell you about a few of them.

In part two of this column's theme, I'll give you some statistics showing just what their actions added up to. You'll be surprised at how many cubic feet of recyclable materials has been spared from going to the landfill, all because a few people cared and took action.

Last spring, Pat Crowley's fourth grade class at the Halifax Elementary School wanted to start some recycling efforts. With the permission and support of Principal, Diane Biggieri and the School Committee, they requested an Abitibi bin for the school grounds. Abitibi collects mixed paper and offers the hosting group a small amount of money. That's a win-win situation. The bin, located by the tennis courts is available to everyone, including the public. I used it one day when my transfer station in Plympton was closed.

Jill Anderson, sixth grade teacher at the Dennett Elementary School, is a "Green Team" leader. She and her class collect paper and recyclable plastics and Ms. Anderson quietly takes it upon herself to bring the items to the transfer station.

I first learned of Wal*Mart's efforts to be involved in sustainability and improving the environment by reading about it. The topic was unexpected and the source, even more so. While reading a Smithsonian magazine, I read about Wal*Mart's

reusable, disposable plastic containers being biodegradable because they were made from P.L.A. or polylactic acid resin which is derived from corn. I continued to be surprised when I visited the local Wal*Mart to talk about recycling. I found them receptive and eager to help in any way they could. One year ago they began adding the store's coat hangers to their compactor to be baled and shipped off for recycling. They readily agreed when I requested that they improve the situation by instructing all the register employees to ask the customers if they wanted the coat hangers, instead of just wrapping them up with the clothes and putting them in the store's plastic bag. People discover the hangers upon arriving home and most of them get thrown away. The register people are asking most of the time but sometimes they get busy and forget. Please participate in this project. The next time you purchase clothing at Wal*Mart, let them know if you do not want the coat hangers.

Stop & Shop has always been involved in some form of recycling. Produce scraps go to the pig farm. There's a whole refrigerated room full of barrels dedicated to storing pig food! Isn't that great? Cardboard is baled for recycling. Stop & Shop is highly motivated to do that because they are paid good money for cardboard and the bale is rejected if it has non-cardboard stuff in it. Actions may speak louder than words but money talks loud and clear. Recycling is not only the right thing to do, it is an important part of business economics.

One year ago, Halifax's municipal departments started recycling paper. I am looking forward to telling you how much we have collected and recycled, thanks to individuals participating, Building Maintenance gathering and Recycling Department picking up. Cooperation allows it to succeed.

Next week, I will continue the story, give you statistics and let you know where you can find some Earth Day displays and activities.

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