

For further info contact:
Shirley Barnes
grassroots@merr.com
March 15, 2009

Special for the Times of Mineral Point

SUSTAIN IOWA COUNTY IS GOING STRONG

Sustainable communities keep an eye on the triple bottom line -- the economic, environmental and social health of their towns and villages. It's like a three legged stool. If one leg is missing, the stool collapses.

That's the idea behind Sustain Iowa County, a newly formed citizen action group that's working with Iowa County officials, school districts, builders, homeowners and others to encourage sustainable practices. The group's kickoff was this spring at Dodgeville High School where over 100 folks came together to talk about how they could take sustainability personally.

Since then, Chuck Tennesen and Karri Roh-Wasley, both Dodgeville teachers, are working to implement a "Green and Healthy Schools" program for Dodgeville schools. They'll be presenting their ideas to the school board in early August and already have volunteers ready to go to work. A Mineral Point parent is interested in exploring a similar idea for schools there and is looking for other interested parents and teachers.

So what does sustainability mean? It's meeting the needs of today without compromising the future. It's looking at the whole picture, using a systems approach -- being aware that protecting our water shouldn't require a heavy use of energy or growing our food shouldn't damage our environment. It's following the four Natural Steps -- cutting back on fossil fuel dependence and the wasteful use of scarce metals and minerals; cutting back on chemicals and synthetic substances that never break down; protecting our land, water, wildlife, soils and ecosystems; while meeting human needs fairly and efficiently.

Such an approach has many benefits. For example, in "Green and Healthy" schools, students perform better because the improved environment makes learning more accessible. Decreased building operating costs are another plus, says Tennesen, who points out that student participation is a key component. Students participate in the assessment process and take an active role in the problem-solving. As future decision makers, they'll need this solid understanding of energy and resource management, he says. To get involved in the "Green and Healthy Schools" initiative in Iowa County or to learn more about it, contact Chuck Tennesen at fivetens@mhtc.net or 987-3835 or Karri Roh-Wasley at rohkarri@verizon.net or 935-1030.

Another effort that's an outgrowth of the Sustain Iowa County kickoff is the Eco-Municipality team led by Brad Glass, Carol Anderson and Shirley Barnes. They've met with officials from Iowa County and Dodgeville to explain that a number of other Wisconsin cities, towns and counties have already becoming eco-municipalities. Glass, Anderson and Barnes will be presenting the concept to the county board and Dodgeville city council in early fall. In the meantime, they'll be researching the experiences of successful eco-municipalities around the state. Like Green and Healthy schools, eco-municipalities are concerned about the triple bottom line -- the economic, environmental and social health of their communities -- when making purchasing decisions and training employees. To learn more about what it means to be an eco-municipality or to get involved, contact Shirley Barnes at grassroots@merr.com or 623-2109.

Doug Huebner, Bill and Jayne Wisler, Liz and Hank Bothfeld and Brian Butteris are part of the "green building" team that will be meeting in the fall to explore the best ways to promote the latest in sustainable building techniques for builders and homeowners. Among the ideas are workshops, home tours of environmentally friendly homes and a bigger and better Sustain Iowa County event in 2009. Others who are interested in helping develop this program should contact Doug Huebner at emma@mhtc.net or 967-2375.

A "bag it" team first got together at the Sustain Iowa County kickoff. They're now seeking others who might like to take on this assignment. The goal of this group will be to find practical solutions for cutting back on the use of plastic and paper bags in Iowa County. Contact Shirley Barnes at grassroots@merr.com if you are interested.

Also in the fall, Sustain Iowa County will be putting up a website with links to sister groups throughout the area, many of whom participated in the spring kickoff. Among them were Upland Hills Garden Club, local food producers, the Cobb Wind Farm, Dodgeville High School's Rainforest Club, the Astronomy Club of Iowa County and the Friends of Governor Dodge.

####