

Youth rise to the challenge at Berkshire Earth Expo

BY JUDY EDDY

The phrase “think globally, act locally” is attributed to the early days of the environmental movement and continues to be widely used today to guide our thinking and our actions. But, apparently, the concept itself can be traced to the early 1800s and a man named Patrick Geddes. A biologist, sociologist, town planner and philanthropist, Geddes not only had a broader view than his contemporaries, but also believed in working *with* the environment, versus working *against* it. He was wise indeed, because today we are learning the harsh lesson that working against the environment brings climate disruption and species extinction – as consumerism, extractive practices and ever-growing human populations imperil our future.

While the need to address these threats transcends generational barriers, it is young people who are standing up and speaking out more and more on the subject of climate and environmental justice, and the complex web of human activity that needs to change, and change now.

Here in the Berkshires, an example of youth leading the way on these vital issues is being showcased at the Fourth Annual Berkshire Earth Expo, where local students will work together with businesses and community groups to tackle the “Cooler Communities Challenge.”

For the past three years, Living the Change Berkshires has been a leading organizer of the Berkshire Earth Expo, a climate and sustainability fair focused on energy efficiency, healthy living, climate resilience and the preservation of nature. Each year, the Expo has grown in size and impact, with a total of over 1,200 people attending.

This year, we’re holding it on April 6 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Boys and Girls Club of the Berkshires on Melville



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Street in Pittsfield. And the Cooler Communities Challenge promises to make it more engaging and impactful than ever.

The guiding goal of the Cooler Communities Challenge is to measurably reduce our community’s collective carbon footprint, make it more beautiful, and save residents money. It features collaboration between schools, businesses and the community at large to achieve this shared goal. Living the Change Berkshires, a volunteer group focused on climate change of which I am a member, has been working since last summer to introduce this promising new model to the Berkshires.

Youth engagement

The Cooler Community Challenge is based on a successful model called “Cooler Concord” developed by the Concord Sustainability Committee in 2017. It launched with the Cooler Concord Fair at Concord Carlisle High School, which brought together around 1,000 residents and featured exhibits and workshops to highlight energy- and cost-saving opportunities for residents. The year-long effort resulted in the community reducing their carbon emissions by 700,000 pounds.

The Berkshire effort is the second manifestation of the broader Cooler Communities initiative that is working to bring the model to communities across Massachusetts and beyond.

Adapting the model to the Berkshires is a challenge all its own, with our region’s wide geography and multiple school districts. We have been fortunate to receive grant funding from the Harold Grinspoon Charitable Foundation and the New England Grassroots Environment Fund, and guidance from Flying Cloud Institute. The event will bring students and their teachers, local sustainable and clean-energy businesses, and diverse community groups together to help visitors learn about and sign up for energy-saving incentives and rebates, solar power and community solar, fossil-fuel-free investing, and many other sustainable living techniques.

As in years past, the Expo will be a “one-stop shopping” experience for all things energy and climate – making it easy and fun to participate, no matter your background or income. And it will be a family fun day, with arts and crafts and other activities for all ages. Flying Deer Nature Center will be conducting nature crafts with children. WordXWord, a local spoken-word group celebrating diversity and the transformative power of words, has created a competition for youth to write and perform their spoken word poems at the Expo. There will be presentations and, of course, healthy, delicious food. And the Berkshire Earth Expo is a no-plastics, no-waste event; Lee Greener

Gateway Committee, Berkshire Compost, and Recycling Works will handle compostable and recyclable materials from the fair. And, of course, admission is free!

What is unique about the Cooler Communities Challenge is that it showcases young people’s interest and engagement with climate change and their environment. This alone is worth celebrating. Youth are inheriting this earth, they are aware of the precarious global conditions that prevail, and they are working on solutions with their usual enthusiasm, joy and hope. We’ve all got our work cut out for us to secure a stable future for them, and we can go far to bolster their efforts with our own.

The work youth are doing in the schools and their communities to solve society’s problems is impressive and important, but I would venture to say that most people in our community don’t know about it. And that’s natural, because once your children leave the school system, or if you don’t have young people in your family, you have either never connected with the schools or you shift your focus when your children move on with their lives. The Berkshire Earth Expo provides a space for us all to connect the dots – and connect with each other – to celebrate the vision, energy and achievement of youth, and take much-needed action to tread more lightly on the earth.

Participating schools include: Muddy Brook Elementary, Bard Academy at Simon’s Rock, and Bard College at Simon’s Rock in Great Barrington; Taconic High and Miss Hall’s School in Pittsfield; Wahconah High School in Dalton; and The Darrow School in New Lebanon, N.Y.

Participating vendors and organizations include: 350mass Berkshires, Ampion Community Solar, BCAC, Berkshire Compost, Berkshire Environmental Action Team (BEAT) and No Fracked Gas in Mass (NFGiM), Berkshire Natural Resources Council, Berkshire Photovoltaic Systems (BPVS), Citizens Climate Lobby, Center for EcoTechnology offering the Mass Solar Access program, Climate Action Now of Western Massachusetts, ener-G-save, Flying Cloud Institute, Flying Deer Nature Center, Green Fire Press, Greenagers, Hoffman Bird Club, Lee Greener Gateway Committee, Mass Audubon, Northeast Solar, Pittsfield Green Commission, Progressive Asset Management, Regeneration Massachusetts, WordXWord, Working Cities, and more. Electric vehicles will be demonstrated along with a PEBL microcar e-bike.

We plan to track the accomplishments and outcomes of the challenge, reflecting all the pledges and actions people undertake at the Expo to demonstrate the power of community working together toward shared common goals. There is no end to what we can do together.

As an extra incentive, visitors will earn points for each action taken. The number of points earned collectively will determine the size of a donation Living the Change will make to Berkshire Children and Families.

Please mark your calendar for April 6 and prepare to take the challenge! ♦

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BerkShares Business of the Month

Almost forty years ago, newly-married Joe Roy Sr. was making a good living from servicing vending machines throughout Berkshire county when a sudden back injury put him out of work. Joe was given an opportunity to prove himself in a new line of work when a friend offered him a job in sales at his new flooring store. Joe didn’t know the first thing about floor coverings, but after a few seminars and successful sales he surmounted the steep learning curve. He quickly learned, however, that the money was in installation— anyone could walk into a big-box home improvement store and pick out their own flooring, but you needed to hire someone to put it in. Joe, by then a floor covering expert, decided in 1983 to open up a business specializing in sales and installation of custom flooring in his hometown of West Stockbridge— aptly named The Floor Store on Main Street.



The Floor Store
12 Main Street, West Stockbridge, MA 01266 (413) 232-7175

Joe Jr. and wife Mary are gearing up to take over for dad Joe Sr. and mom Anne. These days, Joe Sr. handles sales while Joe Jr. coordinates installation and Anne does the bookkeeping while Mary oversees ordering, but, in a true family business fashion, it’s all hands on deck when necessary. Even Joe Jr. and Mary’s two young sons can be found at the office learning the ropes.

Originally located above the Public Market, The Floor Store moved next door a few years later into the “Phoenix Building,” a building that Joe Sr. had built “from the ashes” of the burned-down Miss Ruby’s Restaurant. The newest building on Main Street to this day, The Floor Store is easily recognizable by the mosaic tile sign that hangs above the front door. Inside, slabs of tile, planks of hardwood, and carpet squares line the walls. There’s even a section of vinyl flooring right as you walk in the front door to prove to skeptics that today’s vinyl is not the 1970’s vinyl of their nightmares.

The Floor Store is a true “mom and pop” business, especially because son

At the Floor Store, the “Joe Roys” (as they’re known) pride themselves on providing a complete start-to-finish service and offering the best products available. Over the years they’ve sought out safe and environmentally friendly products like phthalate-free carpet and renewable bamboo wood flooring. They’ve also made a point of sourcing regionally milled lumber and stock hardwood that has been grown and harvested sustainably throughout Appalachia. If they could get it any closer, they would, but in the face of globalization the industry has become more vertically integrated and it’s difficult to source lumber from the Berkshires at an appropriate scale and price. Unfortunately, Joe Jr. says that flooring doesn’t always take priority in home improvement budgets and people will usually go for the less expensive option.

Even still, local comes first at The Floor Store. Although second-home owners account for the majority of their clientele, it’s the year-round local population that, as Joe Jr. says, “keep the lights on in the winter.” Having both been raised in West Stockbridge, Joe Sr. and Joe Jr. understand the implications of keeping money circulating throughout the region and have accepted BerkShares at the store since day one. They don’t see many cash sales, but Joe Sr. says that they accept BerkShares at The Floor Store because, “Anyone who is helping increase the visibility of the Berkshires is helping everyone in it.” He

And BerkShares are just another tool to make the local economy even stronger.

more stories like this one at www.berkshares.org

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