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School's "Green Team" working to make an environmental difference

by Dan McClelland

Conserving energy and living with a better appreciation of our world and its limited resources is the mission of a growing number of high school students here, judging by a presentation at Monday's board of education meeting.

A half-hour long special report from the district's Green Team was delivered in convincing style that evening by senior Bryan Larson, president of the school organization. With Brian was the Green Team's vice president, Lexi Bedore.

Accompanying Bryan and Lexi that evening were several of their team members and their two advisers, Kathy Eldridge and Lori Ransom.

A primary goal of the Green Team here is to "reduce the carbon footprint" of the school district and its participants, Bryan told the board. To that end, the Tupper Lake Green Team was one of the initiators of the first Adirondack Youth Summit of Climate Change at the Wild Center in 2009, which drew young people from school districts all over the region.

Climate change experts say that up until the nation's pre-industrial age, carbon dioxide emissions were never above 280 parts per million. Now those levels exceed 390 parts per million and the goal is to reduce them to 350, Bryan told the school officials.

He said the 390 ppm figure is too high for "sustainable development," which is a term defined as meeting the needs of the present generation without compromising the needs of future ones.

Many scientists believe high carbon dioxide emissions in the atmosphere are advancing the warming of the earth at an alarming rate.

For their work here in recent years, Tupper's Green Team members won the accolades of international author and artist, Schin Schimmel, who presented each person with an autographed copy of his latest book, Butterfly's



Green Team leaders Bryan Larson (right) and Lexi Bedore during Monday night's presentation to the school board.



Treasure- which is devoted to the dangers of global warming. The students presented the board with a copy that evening for the school library.

Two weeks after the first summit, the Green Team held an open house, where members distributed the new CFL light bulbs and information about ways people can reduce the amount of carbon their daily activities produce.

According to Bryan, the team also created a special poster for the event made up of all recycled materials.

On "10-10-10" this past year, Tupper Lake's Green Team joined other environmental groups at Lake Placid and Saranac Lake schools for a pancake fundraiser to help raise public awareness of global warming.

As part of that event at the Shipman Youth Center Bryan said the teams created a new compost pile and rotator bins to routinely stir it, added rain gutters on the building and made reusable shopping bags out of old t-shirts.

On Earth Day last year Tupper's Green Team produced a slide show that was shown to each of the science classes in the district.

Bryan said the team's goal of educating the student population about the importance of conservation is paying off and their message is spreading. The organization has tripled in size in a year, with the membership growing from five to 16.

The team late last year also took a field trip and met with Solar Energy Expert Wayne Davison who installed a new photovoltaic rooftop system at Shaheen's Motel in recent months.

He said the local group again teamed up with their counterparts from Lake Placid and Saranac Lake as part of a steering committee that resulted in the hosting of the Second Adirondack

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Balmy New Year's Day

It was one of the warmest New Year's holidays on record here, with the mercury reaching into the low fifties on the first day of 2011. Friday and Sunday weren't as warm, but they were both very pleasant.

It was so nice Saturday that Guido's Pizzeria owner Gary Kucipak thought he might give his large plate glass windows a wash, and by hour's end he had them shining. His wife Oleysa had been sweeping the street in front of their business, but scurried around the corner when she saw our camera.

The community thermometer at the Park Street's Community Bank branch showed a balmy 54 degrees F. shortly before noon Saturday.

(McClelland photos)

School officials gird for another tough budget year; input sought on Feb. 7th

By Dan McClelland

Still reeling from the pain and strain of the most difficult budget plan in decades, Tupper Lake school leaders are preparing for round 2. The current budget saw dramatic cuts in state aid which prompted the furloughing of 30 school district teachers and staff.

In his first 2011-12 budget presentation to the board Monday night, Superintendent of Schools Seth McGowan painted a bleak picture for the work ahead for the board as it readies a budget for voter approval in May.

"Our condition hasn't changed...in fact, it feels like we may be going from bad to worse!" he told the board about the outlook of state aid for the new budget here.

He indicated that even the money that is supposed to be coming from Albany for the current school year isn't entirely settled, since the district hasn't received most of it yet.

There has been speculation in recent weeks by some school leaders across the north country that mid-year state aid cuts are still a real possibility.

Mr. McGowan produced a graph which showed that for this current school year, Governor David Paterson had proposed \$7.89 million in education aid for Tupper Lake district in his executive budget a year ago. The state legislature had agreed on a figure of \$8.3 million, but that never materialized for Tupper Lake due to an unusually high "deficit reduction" number this district saw. The "deficit reduction" numbers were a way for Governor Paterson to close the budget gap on

the back of school districts in this state.

Tupper Lake's current state aid total is \$7.88 million- down by a million from the year before.

State aid this year represents only 48% of the district's total financial revenue- down dramatically from recent years when it represented as much as 58 or 60%.

The school leader reported that he doesn't expect new Governor Andrew Cuomo's executive budget to be finalized before Feb. 1, since new governors get an extra two weeks to prepare their first financial plans.

If Tupper Lake district sees a continued freeze in its basic "foundation aid" and an additional assessment in the "deficit reduction" formula, Governor Cuomo's proposal for Tupper Lake could be as low as \$6.336 million, his graph showed.

He said he felt it was "extremely unlikely" Tupper Lake will receive the \$7.88 million it received this year.

As he did last year, Mr. McGowan offered the board his "priorities" as he and his administrative team begin work on the new financial plan.

First among the priorities is that the budget "is an educational plan," designed to give children the best education the district can offer with the money available. He said all national, state and local financial information must be carefully factored in. His third priority in the budget preparation, he said, will be to avoid more cuts to programs where possible- out of fear more may disappear forever. "It is

difficult to think of what else could disappear!"

He promised that he and Business Manager Garry Lanthier would again use "a highly conservative approach" to budget building- using last year's executive budget proposal as a start. "We did that last year and we were spot on!" he told the board.

He announced there would be "no new initiatives in the district" if they cost money. Anything new offered would be by "using existing staff in new and innovative ways."

All current items in the budget will be "scrutinized" carefully in the weeks ahead, Mr. McGowan promised the board.

The budget discussion at the board's February meeting will be devoted to a comparison of existing expenditures and proposals for the new plan. Actual existing expenditures will be tracked to the current budget, he noted.

The February 7 meeting is also the time when the public will be invited to share their thoughts with the board on where the district should be spending its money. He encouraged all interested parties to participate that evening.

"This won't be a debate of one program versus another," he said of the public input. "We want to hear from the public what their educational priorities are!"

A large part of the development of this year's budget will be the consideration of recommendations found in the district's new long-

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DOT and village meet again on reconstruction of Routes 3 and 30 through Tupper

by Mary Peryea

Representatives of the state Department of Transportation and the village met Tuesday morning to discuss the reconstruction of routes 3 and 30 project. The meeting was a preliminary step towards a public hearing on the project, which will probably be held in the next month or two.

Mark Frechette, regional director for DOT region 7, said the purpose of the meeting was to open a dialogue with village board members in order to try to build consensus with the people who represent the village. He added that it is important to develop a partnership with the village, as quality of life issues are involved in a project of this type.

Mr. Frechette said this will be a \$10 million+ project with massive reconstruction involved. It has taken years to develop because of the impact it will have on the community through improving the "rideability" of the corridor, correcting safety issues, addressing traffic and pedestrian issues and leaving the area aesthetically pleasing. DOT has to consider not only its own considerations, but also what the village,

property owners and businesses want.

"It's important for you to give us what you think," he told the village board. "We're looking for a partnership with the village."

Mr. Frechette went on to explain that funding for the project will dictate the construction timetable. The project will require federal, state and local dollars. The extent of federal and state funding is uncertain right now, but DOT is aiming to get the project design finished and ready to go once funding is available. Input obtained at the public hearing will be used to determine the final design alternative.

Robert Curtis, DOT's regional design engineer, presented a power point outline of the information to be shared at the public hearing. At that hearing, the public will be able to ask questions, but DOT will not respond directly to them. Information DOT gleans at the hearing may change the way the agency thinks about the project. All information will be transcribed and made a matter of public record.

Mr. Curtis emphasized that no decision has been

made yet on a design alternative.

The project will address ongoing safety concerns, engendered by accident studies showing a higher than average number of accidents in the project area.

The project will also address issues such as poor pavement surfaces and undermined structural integrity, steep grades, utility poles and fire hydrants in parking lanes, inadequate drainage, sidewalks and utilities.

Objectives include improving existing highway geometrics, correcting existing pavement issues, provision of ADA compliant pedestrian facilities, correcting existing safety deficiencies, improving drainage systems and integrating proposed improvements into the community and natural environments.

Several alternatives have been considered during the design phase. Two have been summarized

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