

Salem goes green: City's first energy fair draws thousands

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Salem - More than 1,200 people flowed through the doors of Old Town Hall last weekend for the Salem Living Green and Renewable Energy Fair.

With more than 40 vendors and exhibitors, lectures, a film, storytelling, Segways and one very bright green car, there was something for everyone at the June 14 event. The fair was the first of its kind in Salem.

Adopting a greener lifestyle can start by making small steps — sometimes literally. Cinema Salem offered a free showing of James Barrie's documentary "Kilowatt Ours" that demonstrated how little changes like raising the temperature of the air conditioner and exchanging incandescent light bulbs for compact fluorescents can lower both home energy consumption and that dreaded monthly utility bill.

"Kilowatt Ours" was well received by the audience and garnered a round of applause at the end. When asked why the film was screened free of charge, manager Kereth Cowe-Spigai explained, "Cinema Salem has always had a focus on being a community theater. We are enthusiastic to be part of the community."

She added that "Kilowatt Ours" may be shown again as part of a film festival scheduled for this winter.

Enthusiasm was not contained to the theater. Outside Old Town Hall, Stephen Majeski's brilliant green Mercedes attracted a crowd, as did the Salem Police Department's three-wheeled T3 Segways. Majeski retrofit his car to run on a combination of diesel and filtered cooking oil. He says it gets 50 miles to the gallon and gives off a smell similar to French fries.

Inside Old Town Hall, visitors were treated to more than 40 vendors and exhibitors covering a wide range of products and services from cloth diapers to solar panels to educational programs. Veteran storyteller Tony Toledo kept children entertained with lively interpretations of classic and modern fairy tales, with a little sign language and upbeat environmental messages thrown in.

At the other end of the hall, Marblehead High School sophomore Casey Ehrlich, 16, founder of Blanket the Globe, displayed a few of her quilts made from squares created by children around the world, each one on recycled cloth and bearing the maker's feelings about the environment.

"I wanted to give kids a voice," Ehrlich said.

North Shore Transportation Management Association's executive director Andrea Leary and outreach coordinator Dinah Cardin want to persuade fewer people to commute to work alone by working with businesses to promote carpools, biking, walking, telecommuting and using public transportation. NSTMA, aided with partial funds from the city of Salem, offers incentives to workers at member businesses who use alternative modes of commuting at least two days a week. NSTMA is the organization's eleventh chapter in Massachusetts.

The Gathering, at 217 Essex St., hosted the Living Green Speaker Series, a set of informative discussions on climate change and environmentally-friendly landscaping and home remodeling.

Chamber of Commerce executive director Rinus Oosthoek had expected between 500 to 700 attendees, and was encouraged by the large turnout.

“People are hungry for green products and doing the right thing,” he said. He has already promised there will be similar events.

Jennifer Bell, manager of Salem Main Streets, agrees. “I’m really thrilled there’s so much interest. We definitely want to do this again.”