

The Sheet, July 4, 2008

## OFF THE GRID

### WALKING THE GREEN MILE

Town's latest café not just another fad diet

By Geisel

"We light our lamps for atmosphere and hang our hopes on chandeliers. We're going wrong, we're gaining weight. We're sleeping long and far too late. And so it's time to change our ways..." – Billy Joel from "I've Loved These Days"

"Have I been sleeping? I've been so still, afraid of crumbling. Have I been careless, dismissing all the distant rumblings? Now I am throwing off the carelessness of youth To listen to an inconvenient truth..." – Melissa Ethridge from "I Need to Wake Up"

Al Gore's "An Inconvenient Truth" is a sobering, albeit entertaining, wake up call about "global warming," but its end message was upbeat: you — yes, YOU personally — can do something to help...quite a bit, in fact. The 10th Town-sponsored café, organized by Town Clerk Anita Hatter, drew a diverse group of lawmakers, long- and short-time residents, contractors, Town staff, activists and members of the area's energy community, to what may be the most significant of the series so far. The "Low Carbon Diet" themed cafe centered on how everyday people can have a global affect on climate change from their little corner of the world.

The first half focused on two emotionally driven concepts: "fear" and "hope." Participants moved from table to table discussing concerns ranging from rising snow and falling water levels to the world's dependence on petroleum. Some comments tossed out included "It's too late" and "Chaos is coming – will man be civil when it gets here?" Some lamented corporate giants and contemporary leaders, who they said were guilty of recycling only old rhetoric. Optimistic responses included concepts such as so-called "green-collar jobs" in the new "green" economy, the growth of geothermal, and recycling...especially in our local Post Office and behavioral changes that show being green is "cool" these days. On a side note, with the Town's budget facing its own diet challenges, Town Risk Manager Mike Grossblatt said the expansion of the Town's recycling facility, which call for tripling its size and capability, is still moving forward.

### **You need to drop some weight**

Seriously, you do. About 5,000 pounds...or if that figure's too daunting, think of it as just 2.5 tons. Of course this isn't like going to your doctor and having them say your cholesterol's too high, but according to Gore, and environmental experts such as NASA's James Hansen, your carbon output is too high.

As a society, we've grown fat on packaging, and spent our energy with unbridled excess, particularly here in the U.S., where five percent of the population consumes 25 percent of the resources and generates 75 percent of the waste. Time to go on a "Low Carbon Diet" and shrink our collective "carbon footprint." As defined by ecological economists Wiedeman and Minx, your "carbon footprint" is basically "a measure of the exclusive global amount of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and other greenhouse gases emitted by human activity or during the life of a product or service." If predictions by many environmental scientists are correct, the Earth's populous has about 10 years to alter its fundamental practices before sliding down the slippery slope. Technological advances and legislative work are necessary parts, but those take time. Conservation, on the other hand, is available right now, and that's where you come into the picture.

A new book, "The Low Carbon Diet," may sound like it's a way to cut down on how much barbecue you eat, but in actuality the book's a how-to collection of recipes for individuals and communities to affect climate change. Think of it as an environmental self-help program, only instead of 12 steps, this one has four. And the best part is it works. Statistics show that residences can be responsible for some 50-90 percent of a community's carbon footprint. Portland, Ore., went on the "Low Carbon Diet" and reduced its carbon output 22 percent using simple techniques such as taking shorter showers, recycling and being energy efficient around the home.

Unlike many ideas that in our town can take what seems like forever to get going, this movement is already well underway. The High Sierra Energy Foundation's Leslie O'Berry told the group that a geothermal test well drilling commitment has already been inked between the Town and Iceland America. She also solicited support from the community to help combat the spate of erroneous reasons for resistance to geothermal exploration. These include simple concerns, such the well will generate too much noise and be an eyesore to the landscape, as well as sillier remarks, such as it will cause massive CO<sub>2</sub> leakage from the earth and the volcano will erupt...none of which are true, according to O'Berry.

Sierra Conservation Project Director Brian Robinette reported that SCP and the Town have a grant application in the works that would target expanded recycling for multi-family housing. He then addressed questions regarding the state of recycling in our area, including one from Tourism and Recreation Director Danna Stroud about creating a shared resource for recycling information that would combine the Town's menu of services with those of private entities, which Robinette said was a good idea he'd look into.

As the song says, the children are our future — to that end Mammoth School District President Mary Canada said a classroom version of the diet is also being introduced to educators.

Pick up a copy of "The Low Carbon Diet" at the Booky Joint in Mammoth Lakes and visit [www.empowermentinstitute.net](http://www.empowermentinstitute.net). Hey, you're looking trimmer already.