

Green on Campus

By: Dana Bender

Serving as president of Rowan University's student chapter of the national organization National Wellness Institute, I have learned the realities and dedication required to bring vision into actuality. Last summer, as I interned at the 2007 NWI conference held in Stevens-Point, Wisconsin, I stated I was going to plan an environmental awareness event. This drive emerged after taking an environmental lab course at County College of Morris (CCM) that summer which pulled out my inner earth lover evident at an early age. Combining with my profession as a health promoter, I saw the health and environment connection, and wanted to take action. This aspiration is what has enabled the Rowan University (located in Glassboro, NJ) April 16th, 2008 event: ***Green Fest: a night for students.***

Thinking of environmental issues, one may not include social justice concerns like fair trade, political advocacy, or even conjure up the concept of simple living. I envisioned an event that moved beyond awareness, and was fun, informative and diverse, initiated action, and touched on more than traditional green issues! I wanted to promote concern on social justice issues, sustainability, and green living, as well as recycling and conservation. I wanted to show my fellow students that there are various situations that impact our environment, and that if we all pick one cause that concerns us, and put effort into it, we would have a much better society.

What started as one small drive has escalated into a mission that has driven my life for the past academic year. As each month passed, I grew stronger with desire as things pieced together. Meeting with the Rowan president to gain his support, receiving permission to utilize a Wednesday movie night, contacting the student government and meeting with them on other green projects, requesting co-sponsorship from our student university programmers (SUP), obtaining interest from clubs on campus, sitting in on the recycling team meetings, working on promotional resources and efforts, and even scheduling meetings with advisors and Rowan staff ranging from the Director of Student Activities to Rowan's Director of Facilities. My winter break this year consisted of emailing organizations, requesting, and continuing to inform those around me that "yes, this is happening".

This all may sound like this solely because of my own hard-work, and I agree yes, because the initial work consisted primarily of my own time spent. However, things have changed since January as all those connections and contacts I made during the fall semester began to pool together. There have been successful planning meetings between a few select Rowan groups, NWI members signing up to be volunteers, and even outside individuals contacting me expressing their interest. Not only was this event possible through the dedication of the individual, but now it shows the power of teamwork.

On April 16th, 2008, Rowan groups such as Rebel-U: an anti-big tobacco group, LucyVox: a feminist group, National Wellness Institute, Glassboro's Environment Organization (GEO), and the Rowan Recycling Team plan to have tables in our student center pit to entice people to come to our main event. The tables will consist of information and games for students. One table will even have two laptops set up where students can take quizzes and learn interactively.

One of the groups mentioned above, LucyVox, actually hosted an event last semester with the Sierra Club and Religious Coalition for Reproductive Justice titled “The Fate of the World is In Your Hands and Your Pants”, showing how reproductive rights relate with the escalation of global warming issues. This is to show that even groups that might not be environmental focused, such as our LucyVox feminist group, still show concern over these pressing issues.

The main event of Green Fest will consist of tables from almost thirty professional organizations and business including groups such as NJ Citizen Action, Clean Oceans Action, Defenders of Wildlife, South Jersey Fair Trade, Alternatives for Simple Living, Community Green from Montclair, NJ, and even a presentation by Michael Winka – Director of the State of Energy: just to name a few. All of the participants, which do include a few Rowan groups, will provide information on how students can make a difference, and how they can get involved. Occurring simultaneously as students’ mill around the tables will be informal 10-minute presentations showcasing Rowan's green projects and diverse environmental issues, as well as giveaways in-between each. To conclude the fun, social atmosphere, we will watch The 11th Hour with a live introduction by Richard Whiteford, a environment activist and author who was trained to introduce it in theaters. Abiding to the green theme, there will even be free popcorn offered to those movie attendants who bring their own reusable containers- donated by Whole Foods Market in Marlton, NJ.

The list of participants and donating organizations are endless, and the emails and phone-calls taken on to verify and then re-verify with organizations and others on campus to increase involvement has been a long process, yet will reap benefits on April 16th. Speaking as the Green Fest coordinator, it has been an amazing experience and has taught me more than a course could about the commitment that enables real progress. The Green Fest planning team now working on the last bit of Green Fest details hope that by sharing about this process, that students elsewhere can realize their potential to do more on their campuses, and that awareness is the only way cultures can change. As a result of April 16th's event, we hope to gain knowledge about student perceptions from the evaluation surveys we are distributing at the event, in hopes that more can be done on our campus, and even other university's in New Jersey.

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