

'The consumption culture'

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Rather than hopping into his car to get to work, Ridgewood resident and Bergen Community College (BCC) Dean of Science, Math and Technology Dr. P.J. Ricatto's normal morning ritual entails grabbing his helmet, his mountain bike and a bottle of water. The same can not be said for the more than 450,000 residents in Bergen County who drive to work or school, Ricatto said.

"We have to change the consumption culture [that we live in]" Ricatto said.

According to the American Lung Association's 2009 State of the Air report, Bergen County received an "F" grade for particle pollution. Particle pollution is the end result of burning fossil fuels from automobiles, trucks and factories. Increased exposure could cause respiratory illnesses, and trigger cardiovascular disease, asthma attacks and lung cancer.

Because there hasn't been a motivated change in a long time, Ridgewood Environmental Advisory Committee (REAC) Chairman Ed Schwartz thinks there should be a re-examination into energy consumption and efficiency.

"[Our carbon footprint] is fairly high by virtue of the fact that it hasn't been a major focus for decades," Schwartz said. "I would rate it above average, and that's not because we've focused so much on energy, it's because we focus on quality of life issues, like lots of trees, and not on industry."

Learning and adjusting

Last year, BCC, which currently educates more than 220 students from Ridgewood, joined the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment (ACUPCC). The group, which is expected to address the "climate challenge," includes more than 600 colleges from across the country. The purpose of the association is to reduce global emissions by integrating sustainability into college curriculums.

In January, Ricatto, a 15-year village resident and BCC's "Sustainability Officer," said the

college began doing just that. The school conducted its own internal-energy audit to curb a \$2 million annual energy bill, in addition to a greenhouse gas study. Ricatto said the study determined that commuting constitutes 64 percent of the college's energy usage, followed by electricity purchased at 25 percent, and natural gas usage at 7 percent.

With these findings, the college will begin to determine alternative means to properly provide energy to the 44-year-old facility. He said officials have already begun incorporating environmental awareness and literacy into the course catalog at the college.

"Everything we do on campus, there is an educational component to it," Ricatto said. "We want to show [it] off and teach, and use it as a teaching laboratory for our students. So there's going to be a geothermal project, a photovoltaic project and a wind generation project."

Ricatto also referenced the school's "Bergen Green Team," a group of 15 work-study students who maintain and empty all recycling bins on school grounds. In addition, the school has begun working with its cafeteria vendor to start composting scraps. On Earth Day, team members visited Willard Elementary School to conduct a presentation on sustainability.

Ricatto said the ultimate goal for BCC "is to reduce the carbon footprint while saving an enormous amount of money on the energy bills."

Taking steps

BCC's attempts to change this ideology go hand-in-hand with the village and Ridgewood Public School District, who have already begun taking steps to erase their "carbon footprints" in the form of sustainability initiatives.

Through the New Jersey Office of Clean Energy (OCE), the New Jersey Clean Energy Program (NJCEP) is pushing numerous energy conscious initiatives across the state.

Schwartz said that residents and municipalities will also see huge incentives as a result of the U.S. Government Federal Stimulus Package. Individual homeowners can participate in the Home Performance with ENERGY STAR program and municipalities can take part in the Local Government Energy Audit Program.

"The good news is the government needs us, not wants, needs us to reduce energy for dozens of reasons," said Schwartz, a certified energy professional and sustainability consultant. "[It ranges] from everything from the environment to greenhouse gases, and national security and foreign energy policy."

Schwartz said that residents and the village have already started "kicking off" the effort. The theory is to "lead by example," Schwartz said. The local government initiative will help to identify cost-justified energy measures and will subsidize up to 100 percent of the costs of the audit. The individual home program will offer "whole house" solutions to

reduce energy and consumption. The NJEC and the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities expects homeowners to save up to 30 percent on energy costs.

"The government is trying to make it a no-brainer for everyone to do it," Schwartz said.

Acting locally

The Ridgewood School District is also involved in numerous energy-saving programs, according to Superintendent of Schools Dr. Daniel Fishbein. For the past 10 years, the district has saved 35 percent in energy consumption through its affiliation with Energy for America. In addition, the district has agreed to take part in a program to lower the use of power on the main electrical grid in the northeast by shutting down unused systems should the grid reach its maximum usage.

In addition, Fishbein said that all cleaning and pest management chemicals used by district vendors are deemed "green" products. When asked about recycling and "green" education at the K-12 level, Fishbein said "it's a never-ending process."

"You know we're a school, and we are, what I would call 'paper intensive,' and while we do recycle, it's something that we need to do a better job of," Fishbein said. "It's a continual education process to remind people to put things in recycling bins. We constantly have to educate our students, our employees that we do recycle and that they [the bins] are around."


Schwartz said that the REAC, in association with the League of Woman Voters, will start a seminar session to educate the community in the fall. The purpose of the sessions is to get people on board with individual audits and show them the benefits of being energy conscious.

Schwartz said he hopes his home, which was constructed in 1767, will serve as an example for other residents. His three-year-old company, Green Living Solutions, helped to transform his residence by installing highly efficient heating and cooling systems, all-climate heat pumps, solar panels, a rain water harvesting system and compost containers.

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