

Earth Day offers hope to youth

Written by Lydia Schwartz - Contributing Writer
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The Sierra Club and NAACP held an Earth Day celebration at the Minneapolis Urban League on Saturday, April 30th to promote clean industrial methods and to celebrate the enthusiasm of young people for protecting their environment.

The Sierra Club works closely with Minneapolis community leaders in neighborhoods disproportionately affected by toxic by-products. They advocate strengthening environmental protection agencies toward eliminating the release of mercury in Minnesota's precious water resources and other toxins into the air.

The Sierra Club State Director, Margaret Levin, and the Program Director, Leslie Fields, presented US Rep. Keith Ellison (DFL-Minneapolis) with an Appreciation Award because he stands as such a strong voice for the underrepresented. He says that the award is ours, "because I couldn't do anything if you didn't send me to Washington."

"Everyone wants clean air but the profits of energy companies often override the needs of the people. It costs money to take care of pollutants so companies won't do it on their own, we need to make them. We have to protect our civil rights and environment with integrity because the big companies don't care. Environmental protection agencies are being destroyed by industry because it costs them money to comply with regulations. We have to stand up strong for them," Ellison said.

Ellison supports bringing passion and science together to create technologies that don't hurt our environment and health. He says that we must do all we can to educate others, "that we can have clean air and a good economy. We must advocate any action for the environment, be it through music or the education of others. We're not going to solve the whole problem at once, but every action does a lot of good."

Our youth deserve an education that is Earth-conscious to build a new, healthy way of life. The Kitty Andersen Youth Science Center (KAYSC) at the Science Museum in St. Paul empowers youth to change our world through its engaging after school, Saturday, and summer science programs.

The students encourage everyday environmental practices in their communities by attending local events and educating others about human sustainability. Shiranthi Goonathilaka, part of Earth Buzz and DREAM (Driving Realistic Environmental Actions Movements Solutions) at KAYSC, advocates the importance of educating others. "We teach kids how to create urban greenspace by gardening, recycling and buying less, and how to eat healthy...Watching the kids learn and grow is truly motivating," she said.

Green Teams, an emerging youth movement that artistically expresses hope for healthy neighborhoods, encourage others to stand up for smart technology. They do this through music and educating others about the hazards of pollution. Students at the High School for Recording Arts in St. Paul musically conveyed their concern for fellow youth because of a growing unemployed population. They ask, "You boys/girls unemployed? Get a green job!"

Green jobs offer hope to youth across the Twin Cities. The BlueGreen Alliance has training

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programs to both industrial workers and employers on clean, efficient manufacturing and construction practices. Green jobs will increase the safety of industrial, farm, and construction workers. There is a growing need to invest in the use of green chemistry and technologies that prevent the further pollution of our environment.

The BlueGreen Alliance also believes in harsher penalties for companies found to be using hazardous products. They argue that government environmental protection agencies should not have to bear the burden of proving that a certain chemical is unsafe. Chemical companies need to prove to the society they serve that the manufacture of their products is not hazardous to our health.

We have the power as consumers to drive the market toward environmentally-safe practices. Healthy Legacy promotes an economic system that can support toxic-free methods of production, farming, and construction. The public health coalition believes that working with business leaders to keep our homes and the environment safe is the best way to reduce the amount of fetal disease and child asthma. Healthy Legacy also teaches families package-reduction and composting practices.

Our growing economy can support the education of young people and the development of green products and services. MN Pollution Control Agency Commissioner Paul Aasen agrees that math and science give us the power to fix technology. He is especially concerned about the increasing pollutants in high traffic areas.

Aasen believes that we can bring hope for a better society to those who hold strong antigovernment sentiments. "Clean water is invaluable but the government cannot mandate people to drive less...We haven't been getting away from burning fuel, just better at controlling it. But we can start the conversation. Our tax dollars should go toward creating a smart grid based on solar-power. We simply need to stop giving government subsidies to oil companies and create a completely different political structure," he said.

For more information, visit: The NAACP Minneapolis website, www.MinneapolisNAACP.org ; The Sierra Club North Star Chapter website, Minnesota.SierraClub.org; or The Minneapolis Urban League website, MUL.org