

Six Area Activists Working to Save the Globe

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Environmentalism often seems like something trendy happening in big cities like San Francisco and Portland, Ore., but in truth there are conservationists making a difference right here in our own backyard. Here are six “green” individuals grown in the New River Valley (NRV).

Bill Beachy

Occupation: Vice President of Energy Services for Community Housing Partners, Blacksburg, Va. (www.communityhousingpartners.org)

Environmental Stewardship Highlights:

- Manages the Weatherization Program in the NRV
- Spent 10 years as the State Manager of the Virginia Weatherization Assistance Program
- Positions on numerous national boards and committees in the Energy and Weatherization arena
- Received the U.S. Department of Energy Award for Outstanding Service to the Weatherization Program (1995)

On the NRV's Environmental Future:



As an example of how we can improve conservation in this area, Beachy said, “I built my home about 4 years ago. I have incorporated materials and practices that have now become commonly know as “green” or “sustainable.” I have ceramic and bamboo floors, cellulose (recycled newspaper) insulation, composite (recycled plastic) decking and screen porch materials, Energy Star appliances, carefully air-sealed and insulated duct work and one high efficiency heat pump conditioning nearly 4,800 square feet and I have an average monthly electric bill of less \$120. My overall budget did not suffer and that monthly electric bill certainly says volumes.”

Advice for NRV Residents:

“Opportunities for the NRV, and anywhere, to move toward reducing its footprint, are everywhere. Environmentally friendly and energy saving products and materials are not new and improve constantly. If residents, consumers, and folks in positions of setting policy look at what they do as an investment in their future and the future of the children and grandchildren, we would not have to think about what we can do, we would simply be doing it.... everyday.”

Gail Billingsley

Occupation: Executive Director, YMCA at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va. (www.vtymca.org)

Environmental Stewardship Highlights:

- Increasing the types of items the Y Thrift shops receive and recycle
- Sent more than 30 tons of electronics to be disposed of correctly to keep heavy metals out of the waste stream in 2007
- Launched a program called “Ytoss?” to get students to donate at the end of each semester instead of tossing items into the dumpsters
- Part of the initial Sustainable Blacksburg grant in 2006/2007

On the NRV's Environmental Future:

“How we treat the environment comes into play every day in our lives through small choices: Recycle bottles and cans, let storm water drain through grassy areas or directly into streams, cutting down on gas usage. You have to be aware of the impact you make each day. There are some groups in the NRV that are proactively protecting the lands and waterways. We need to make sure we’re all participating, insisting our governmental officials also do. Indeed, the NRV is lucky to have environmentally aware elected and appointed officials.”

Advice for NRV Residents:



“Don’t use more than you need. Don’t dispose of something that someone else may need. We don’t have to be a disposable society unless we choose to be.” Her second best advice? “Eat locally grown foods as much as you can.”

Anthony Cox

Occupation:

Building science manager for Community Housing Partners and the New River Center for Energy Research and Training, Christiansburg, Va.

Environmental Stewardship Highlights:

- Provides nationwide training in residential energy conservation and diagnostics
- Developed “House of Pressure” as a training tool to visually demonstrate home performance testing
- Involved with energy-efficient building and weatherization for more than 18 years



On the NRV’s Environmental Future:

“In reference to my field I would say that the New River Valley has started toward building more efficient and sustainable homes. This is mainly through two energy efficient building programs, Energy Star (www.energystar.gov), and EarthCraft Virginia (www.ecvirginia.org), which have been promoted through the local home-builder association. These two programs are currently for new construction but are beginning to move toward existing homes as well, which is something that is needed in the NRV. So I would say the future is bright, especially as more people become educated about building efficiency.”

Advice for NRV Residents:

- Have an energy audit performed on your home by a home energy rater (www.resnet.us)
- Attend the annual Green Living and Energy Expo at the Roanoke Civic Center (www.aecp.org/Expo/overview.shtml)
- Visit the Sustainable Living and Education Center in Floyd (www.aecp.org/SLEC/slec.shtml)
- Attend the 2nd annual New River Valley Green Home Tour (nrvgreenmob.blogspot.com)
- Energy Audits and Repairs are free to those qualify for the Department of Energy’s Weatherization Program; to see if you qualify, go to: www.dhcd.virginia.gov/HousingPreservationRehabilitation/Weatherization_Assistance.htm



Dave Roper

Occupation: Professor Emeritus of Physics at Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Va.
(<http://arts.bev.net/RoperLDavid/>)

Environmental Stewardship Highlights:

- At Roper’s and other concerned citizens urging, the town of Blacksburg has embarked on a path of reducing global-warming emissions by joining the Cool Cities coalition of cities and towns
- Purchased a Toyota Prius for himself and a Toyota Highlander Hybrid for his wife
- Purchased renewable energy credits (REC’s) equal to the amount of electric power his family uses in a year, for a reputable wind-power electric generating facility in West Virginia
- Gives talks regularly to local service clubs about fossil-fuels depletion and global warming
- Initiated a project to build a solar greenhouse at the upcoming VT YMCA community gardens

On the NRV’s Environmental Future:

Roper feels that he and his local community must voluntarily make the effort to reduce global-warming gas emissions and develop renewable energy. “Perhaps when enough individuals and communities do that, there will be a willingness to pass laws nationally and globally that require everyone to do it,” Roper said.

Advice for NRV Residents:

“You should walk, bicycle, and drive electric vehicles as much as you can, and turn your thermostat as high as you can tolerate in the summer and as low as you can tolerate in the winter. Purchase locally as much as you can, especially with food. I also recommend urging your local, state, and national politicians to do everything they can to accelerate the development of renewable energy and high-efficiency

products and to change land use to reduce energy and materials consumption.”

Ed Tuchler

Occupation: Manager/Owner of Shelter Alternatives, Inc., Blacksburg, Va. (www.shelteralternatives.com)

Environmental Stewardship Highlights:

- Presented at numerous conferences and cited in many publications as spokesperson for Shelter Alternatives
- President of Energy Check, a new company that provides comprehensive home performance assessments (energy audits) on existing homes, and certification for several green building certifications offered for new homes
- Works closely with NRV's greenMOB
- Participating in 2nd Annual New River Valley Green Home Tour and Seminar (9 a.m.-5 p.m. on April 26, NRVgreenMOB.blogspot.com)

On the NRV's Environmental Future:

“I think that the environmental focus in the NRV is growing, but there are many people who are only now beginning to understand it. Blacksburg has joined the Cool Cities initiative and with that and the Sustainable Blacksburg program there are many people who are trying to make good things happen for the environment.

“My perspective is housing, and there are more builders adopting the EarthCraft Homes program for their projects. This is a certification for building a greener home and it is a road map of sorts to help people make the right choices. The process makes the homes better and the certification should increase the value of the home at resale. There are still many people, though, who don't take a broad enough view and do not see the benefit. I believe that continuing the education process is critical to making change.”

Advice for NRV residents:

“The most critical is for residents to decrease their energy consumption and contribution to carbon dioxide emissions,” Tuchler said. He recommends the following.

1. Home - Caulking and insulating can increase the energy efficiency of your home. Tuchler recommends beginning with an energy audit. “This is a scientific assessment of the systems in your home and leads to recommendations of where your efforts are best spent. Often the diagnosis and repair of your heating and cooling system can have a tremendous impact.”
2. Lifestyle - “Adjusting your thermostat higher in the summer and lower in the winter can decrease your energy use.” Tuchler also suggests turning off lights and hanging clothes to dry rather than using a dryer.
3. Car - “If you choose an efficient model to drive then you are decreasing your impact with each trip. If you can minimize the number of trips by planning, walking, biking, or carpooling you can have an even greater impact.”
4. Shopping - “Buy as locally as you can, and look for products with minimal packaging. Choosing products with less processing will help reduce the impact in the area where these products are created. Also buying quality products that will last helps reduce landfill waste and lowers replacement costs.”



Billy Weitzenfeld

Occupation: Executive Director, Association of Energy Conservation Professionals, Floyd, Va. (www.aecp.org)

Environmental Stewardship Highlights:

- Virginia Weatherization Policy Advisory Council
- Certified Home Energy Rater
- Commonwealth of Virginia Energy and Sustainability Conference Planning Committee (2007)
- Member of Virginia State Corporation Commission; working to reduce electricity consumption in Va. by 10% by 2022
- Participated in sessions on Green Residential Development and Sustainability in Action

On the NRV's Environmental Future:

“The greatest power we all have is to practice conservation in our homes; be less wasteful, utilize existing energy efficient technology—programmable thermostats, Energy Star appliances, compact fluorescent light bulbs, etc.—and make better decisions in the home and marketplace. The power of these often simple solutions and low cost/no cost activities exercised daily in the home are the first step and could bring about dramatic change overnight.”

Advice for NRV Residents:

Weitzenfeld lists some tips for NRV residents to follow:

1. Better understand how your home operates as a system. Have an energy audit performed or do some type of home energy assessment yourself

1. Assessment yourself.
2. Use less hot water.
3. Manage your heating and cooling thermostats more efficiently.
4. Have a professional examine your duct system for leakage.
5. Keep your heating and cooling systems tuned and cleaned on an annual basis.
6. Check your insulation levels.
7. Unplug all electronic equipment in the home when not in use.
8. Change your furnace and air conditioner filters on a regular basis or as needed.
9. Purchase Energy Star appliances.
10. Use compact fluorescent light bulbs throughout the home.
11. Drive less. Walk and bike more.
12. Plant trees.

He summarizes well, saying, "The best conservation advice for NRV residents is simply to practice conservation on a daily basis in your home and in your lifestyle."

Meghan George and Holly Hinte know a little something about renewable energy. We use all of theirs that we can. They're Voice interns!

0 responses so far ↓