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A GREENER SHADE OF YOUTH

New Generations Put Earth First

by Randy Kambic



Every generation gets a chance to change the world.

~Paul David Hewson (Bono)

Baby boomers inspired in their youth by Earth Day are now supporting a new generation's enthusiasm for sustainability through educational and employment opportunities. A 2015 Nature Conservancy survey of 602 teens from 13 to 18 years old revealed that roughly 76 percent strongly believe that issues like climate change can be solved if action is taken now; they also hold that safeguarding important lands and waters should be a priority, regardless of ancillary benefits or the economy. This represents an increase in awareness since a 2010 Yale University Project on Climate Change Communication survey of 517 youths 13 to 17 years old showed that just 54 percent believed global warming was even happening.

Launched as Teens for Safe Cosmetics in 2005 and renamed Teens Turning Green two years later, today's expanded Turning Green (TG) nonprofit of Marin County, California, also informs and inspires college and graduate students to live and advocate for an eco-lifestyle (TurningGreen.org).

TG's first 30-day Project Green Challenge (PGC) in 2011 involved 2,600

students nationwide and internationally; last fall's annual edition drew 4,000 students. "We've seen tremendous increases in sustainability offices and curriculums at universities nationwide," notes Judi Shils, founder and executive director. "They have set an intention."

Reilly Reynolds, a senior at Ohio Wesleyan University, hopes to take up urban farming and eventually own a farm-to-table organic restaurant. The PGC finalist and TG student advisory board member says, "I strive to lead an environmentally friendly and socially responsible life, but there is always room for improvement."

Another PGC 2015 finalist, Matt Gal, a senior at the University of Arkansas, also aspires to be an organic farmer. He wants "to grow and give away as much fresh and organic food as possible to people who need it most."

The TG ProjectGreenU.org site features eco-friendly products, plus green advice geared for college students. It also operates a Conscience College Road Tour, leadership program, and organic non-GMO school lunch programs in Marin County and

Sausalito schools via its Conscious Kitchen and Eco Top Chef programs.

Milwaukee's 13th annual Sustainability Summit and Exposition (*SustainabilitySummit.us*), from April 13 to 15, will admit local students for free. "We'll address trends and potential careers in energy engineering, environmental health and water quality technology, sustainability and renewable energy," says Summit Chair George Stone, a Milwaukee Area Technical College natural sciences instructor.

Bradley Blaeser, founder and co-owner of The Green Team of Wisconsin, Inc., which provides eco-friendly landscaping and gardening services, helped start the Sustainable Enterprise Association of Milwaukee. As a social worker at the nonprofit Neighborhood House of Milwaukee in the late 90s, he helped young people in schools and community centers learn how to build their own aquaponics system, plus other gardening skills.

"We hit the marks as far as science guidelines," he recalls. "Kids would see the entire seed-to-harvest cycle through after-school and summer camps. Teachers also embraced nature a little more and saw how they could infuse it in curriculums." He notes that two young men that subsequently graduated from local colleges currently work for Neighborhood House and Growing Power.

More recently, he's worked with two local organizations, Next Door Foundation and Operation Dream, to

teach youngsters agricultural skills and find recruits for related job training internships and employment. Green Team landscape technician Darius Smith, 25, of Milwaukee, will become a crew leader this spring. "You get a good feeling installing plants," he says. "We're a team, working in sync."

For the 13th year, the Agricultural Fair Association of New Jersey (*njagfairs.com*) has selected a youth ambassador—Rebecca Carmeli-Peslak, 16, of Millstone Township, near Princeton—to visit 2016 fairs to promote agri-tourism and encourage youngsters to pursue agricultural careers.

"It's important for kids to know where food comes from," says Carmeli-Peslak, who is also in her second year as a local 4-H Club health and fitness ambassador, visiting Monmouth County libraries to speak on healthy eating and exercise. She's training selected peers to speak in other counties; the club's latest Look to You award recognizes her mentoring prowess. She says, "I want to be a large animal vet and own a farm."

"Young people are becoming well informed about environmental issues by traditional and social media," observes Shils. "There's exponential growth in their taking a stand and becoming more active."

Randy Kambic is an Estero, FL, freelance editor and writer who regularly contributes to Natural Awakenings.



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