

Sustaining Hope

It's getting a little warm around here... I know it's an El Nino year, and you can't draw conclusions from a single season in one place, but we're breaking records with our (lack of) winter weather. As much as I enjoy winter sunshine, it's disturbing to me. I've spent the better part of the last year looking at global warming and sustainability issues in the course of my work, and I've realized that I as an individual need to choose now how I will respond to the global warming crisis: be a part of the apathy and status quo, which could lead to devastating climate change, or to choose HOPE, and take quick action.

Being a basically optimistic person, I'm opting for hope. Actually, I'm actively choosing hope, and stepping outside of my comfort zone, because that's what it will take to make a difference. It's tempting to feel that nothing that we, as individuals, can do will have an effect. But nothing could be further from the truth. I am not separate from this problem, but I can be some small part of a collective solution. Lester Brown, of the Earth Policy Institute put it this way: "*Saving our civilization is not a spectator sport.*" Does this sound drastic? I think we are in for drastic times in the coming decades unless we all do our part.

My hope is that this column can be a place where we can find collective solutions; a place to read about what people in our community, and others, are doing to combat global warming and provide a sustainable future for the coming generations. Nationwide, people are pooling their knowledge and resources to brainstorm solutions. Why not in Alliance? This is a topic I am glad to begin to address, as an enthusiast, but I hope that other more expert voices will join in with their own experiences, so that this can be a sort of community sharing of ideas and inspiration; an antidote for apathy.

Where do we start? I would suggest that we begin with what is easy.

Imagine what would happen if each person, household, business, community and institution did what they could easily do to reduce their energy use – say they changed a few light bulbs to fluorescents or turned down the thermostat a couple of degrees. Do you know that fluorescent light bulbs use between a third and a fifth of the energy of standard bulbs, and only need replacing about every seven years? That means less coal being burned for a home's energy use. That means less CO2 being pumped into the atmosphere and oceans. It's hope.

Imagine now what would happen if each family, business and institution committed to cutting in half its energy used for lighting. If you replaced three out of four bulbs with fluorescents, you would be using about half of the energy. If you replaced every incandescent light bulb inside (and outside) your home with a fluorescent bulb, you would be using about a quarter of the total lighting energy you do now. Several stores in town sell them in economy packs, and there's a variety of sizes, shapes and warm colors now. You can look at options online. They're not cheap, but they're very economical – with a flood light you stand to save as much as \$93 on energy use over the life of the

bulb; a 60 watt replacement can save you as much as \$45. And remember, they last about seven years (put away those chairs and ladders after you're done!).

What if some households and businesses could actually go nearly carbon emission-free, as the Hobson/DeGrange family has done here in Alliance, with solar panels, high-efficiency appliances and light bulbs and a hybrid car? Ford, Walmart and Giant Eagle are some of the businesses that are exploring such options, and making commitments to change.

So here's a New Year's challenge: make a commitment to hope.

Find out the facts - there's no motivator like the truth: put aside your politics for the greater good, and rent the movie "An Inconvenient Truth," and be sure to watch the extras with updates since the release of the DVD for a hopeful finish. Read Lester Brown's book "Plan B2.0." Or take a few minutes to go to ClimateCrisis.org, or to NASA's website, or the EPA's, or to the United Nation's environmental website. Check out the US Mayors Climate challenge online for some encouragement.

Take some small step to make a difference. It doesn't have to be all or nothing. We don't have solar panels, yet. We don't have a hybrid car, yet. But we can drive less, and walk more, get out the bicycle, turn down the thermostat, recycle more, shut off the computer when we're not using it, use fewer lights...and we can change a lightbulb.

*'Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing
because he could only do a little'* *Edmund Burke*

Let's choose hope.