

Nothing but blue skies

Co-operative brings organic gardening to people with mental challenges

By NAJAT ABDOU-MCFARLAND

Sackville's new Open Sky Co-operative aims to open up possibilities for individuals with mental challenges. The group's founders (Margaret and Eric Tusz-King, Norm and Laura Hunter, Melody Petlock and Robert Lapp) have combined their passion for organic gardening with a desire to share its therapeutic effects with others.

The founding members were largely guided by their own life experiences in developing the project. Norm Hunter is an organic farmer by trade. He has also worked with individuals with mental challenges in Pugwash, Nova Scotia.

Margaret and Eric Tusz-King have long made their concern for the environment an important priority, having built an energy efficient passive solar home and opening it up to many who have wanted to see first-hand how they can reduce their own environmental footprint. Margaret also has first-hand experience dealing with mental challenges through her own family experiences.

Tusz-King says that she was motivated by the knowledge that there is a huge gap in services and support for individuals with mental challenges particularly as they reached adulthood. There is now a large body of scientific research indicating that most people respond positively to working with plants. The area of research devoted to this plant-people relationship is called therapeutic horticulture.

The model employed by Open Sky Co-operative has been successfully implemented in other places including Providence Farm in Duncan, British Columbia. There is also a Care Farm movement in Europe where those who are often excluded from many mainstream activities in society (such as employment) are included in something meaningful and educational.

Tusz-King and Hunter are hopeful that they will accomplish a significant amount on the co-operative's ten and-a-half acres this season with the help of volunteers. The plan is to focus on less care-intensive crops like garlic. Later on, they would like to expand into small animal husbandry starting with poultry. For the time being, the focus is on preparation. The co-op will plant some cover crops like buckwheat then rye in the fall to launch an assault on aggressive couch grass. This is an organic approach to preparing the ground.

The farm is also home to two horses, and the co-op members have hopes of creating a therapeutic riding program at a later date.

In addition to organic gardening, Tusz-King would like to see the Open Sky Co-operative provide opportunities to live on site. She says that many people with mental challenges have trouble attaining financial security, and as a result live in unstable living arrangements. She would like the Open Sky Co-operative to be a place where those with mental challenges can find a safe and caring home.



Open Sky Co-operative's barn in Sackville, NB. Photo by Margaret by Tusz-King.

Open Sky Co-operative is currently supported by private funds, but the group is applying for government funding to grow and flourish. Tusz-King says she wants to engage the community in the Open Sky Co-operative, including businesses and the university.

The response from people in the community has been overwhelmingly positive says Tusz-King -- further encouragement that the Open Sky Co-operative will be a welcome addition to the community.

Homophobia *(continued from page 1)*

PFLAG Canada reports that 26% of LGBT youth are told to leave home; LGBT youth are more likely to become homeless; 43% of trans-identified persons attempt suicide; and LGBT students hear anti-gay slurs 26 times a day.

PFLAG says their volunteers are contacted everyday by "frightened adolescents and by angry, fearful or ashamed parents." Cherie MacLeod, Executive Director of PFLAG Canada, says that, "The campaign represents an opportunity to outreach to those in need, encourage acceptance, and build on our announcement last month to launch the first national 24/7 LGBTQ-A (LGBT, Queer and Allies) support line, website and community network later this year."

"Education fosters understanding, which paves the road towards acceptance. Understanding feeds the vitality of society. Without it, respect for diversity is framed in tolerance and that is not the goal of PFLAG Canada," added MacLeod. "Tolerance is the same as quiet contempt. PFLAG is focused on acceptance. Our goal is not to silence people, but rather to foster understanding."

It does indeed get better. Canadian attitudes toward LGBT people have come a long way, and are far from what they are in Uganda, but also far from where they need to be in order for this to be a truly open and accepting society.

Community Calendar

For details and updated event listings, visit nbmediacoop.org To list your event or to receive the community calendar by email once per week, email: community@nbmediacoop.org.

Falls Brook Centre's 3rd Annual Free School. Free Schools are based on the premise that everyone is a teacher and we all have a lot to learn. Each year, the topics change as different people with different ideas and skills come to teach and learn. There will be activities for children of all ages, indoor and open-air activities, walking tours, music and delicious home-cooked meals on the grounds of Falls Brook Centre in Knowlesville, NB. Registration is free. Deadline is July 1st for teachers and students. Meals cost \$7 per meal. Camping costs \$15 per tent. For more info or to register, contact julia@fallsbrookcentre.ca or call 506-375-4310.

Membership Options

☐ \$3.00/month

☐ \$10.00/month

☐ \$25.00/month

☐ \$10.00/year

☐ \$30.00/year

☐ \$50.00/year

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Application forms and cheques may be mailed to NB Media Co-op at 180 St. John St, Fredericton NB, E3B 4A9

In Brief...



On May 18th, former Brunswick mine worker, Roger Leblanc and his wife, Yvette, picketed outside the WorkSafe NB office in Bathurst. Leblanc says WorkSafe NB fails to recognize that he is suffering from workplace-related diseases and heavy metal poisoning stemming from his work at the mine. The zinc, lead, copper and silver mine owned by Xstrata is located 20 km from Bathurst. The couple is requesting financial compensation for the medical treatments and other related expenses. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

The streets of Sussex were wet, cold and lined with dozens of supporters of Penobsquis residents and opponents of shale gas with colourful signs on May 16th. Demonstrations were held outside the Mining Commissioner Hearings where Beth Nixon from the Concerned Citizens of Penobsquis took the stand for the first time to plead a case for damages to homes she says were caused by PotashCorp's operations in her community. Technical reports that back the claims of the Penobsquis residents were ruled inadmissible by Roger Duguay, the Mining Commissioner, with the reason that the authors of the report were not there to comment on them. Later that week and into the following week, more residents provided testimony of the damage done to their water wells and homes. Nixon says it is emotionally draining to watch her neighbours testify--some elderly, in tears, their voices trembling. Nixon says, "Residents of Penobsquis and New Brunswick deserve better. We deserve a government that looks out for our interests, our communities and our environment." The demonstration moved to the conference site of the Atlantic provinces' Premiers that afternoon. The NB Media Co-op, initially told they would be allowed into the Premiers' media conference, was turned away at the door after being asked if they were with the Penobsquis group.

Southwestern Energy, the parent company of SWN Resources that currently holds a three year licence to explore for oil and gas over 1 million hectares in New Brunswick, is facing two lawsuits in the U.S. related to their fracking of gas. Hundreds of people are expected to join a class-action lawsuit filed in mid May against the company in Arkansas for damages the residents say were done to their wells because of the company's use of fracking to obtain gas. The company is also facing a claim for damages to wells from a dozen families in Pennsylvania.

- Dr. Michel Duguay, a nuclear physicist and electrical engineering professor at Laval University, visited Fredericton on May 19th to comment on lessons to be learned from the Fukushima nuclear core meltdown in Japan. "The Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) will have us believe that core meltdowns are a 'once in a million years' occurrence. But the historical record featuring three severe nuclear accidents with core meltdown in the 50-year long nuclear energy history prove otherwise." Duguay says, "Canadian law on nuclear energy specifies that the CNSC must inform the public in a scientifically objective way on all nuclear matters. CNSC is breaking the law by not objectively informing the public about several outstanding nuclear safety issues as described in more technical CNSC documents from 2007-2010. This gap constitutes an alarm signal not only about the dangers imposed on the public by CANDU reactors but also about the lack of rigorous control of the nuclear industry on the part of CNSC."
- Five senior freelance journalists refused to sign a contract with the Halifax Chronicle Herald that would grant the largest newspaper in Nova Scotia exclusive, worldwide and perpetual rights to their work, with no additional compensation. Chris Benjamin, an award-winning author and one of the columnists who refused to sign the new contract, said, "I repackage stuff all the time and sell it to other publications... that's the only way I can make money as a journalist." Silver Donald Cameron, who also refused to sign what he called an unacceptable contract on its freelancers, noted that the columnists who refused to sign were the only voices of the environmental movement in the paper.
- "Deep green" environmentalist and philosopher David Orton died in Pictou County, Nova Scotia on May 12th at the age of 77. Orton was noted for his contributions to left biocentrism, an environmental perspective that according to Orton opposes capitalism, economic growth and consumerism.
- According to a report by the Workers' Action Centre, one in three workers in Ontario's cleaning, hospitality, retail and construction sectors are owed wages or were fired without termination pay or notice.
- The largest oil spill in Alberta since 1975 leaked 28,000 barrels of crude onto the traditional territory of the Lubicon Cree, a few kilometres from their community, making residents sick. A smaller spill occurred in the Northwest Territories along an Enbridge pipeline.
- Strike actions involving teachers, social workers and health-care professionals are sweeping Saskatchewan. Almost 12,000 Saskatchewan teachers staged a one-day strike for the first time in the province's history on May 5th, after almost a year of failed negotiations with the ruling conservative Saskatchewan Party. Ninety-five per cent of teachers voted in favour of job action against low wages. The starting salary for a Saskatchewan teacher is \$7,560 per year less than teachers in the rest of western Canada.
- The United Food and Commercial Workers has revealed union busting tactics being used by the Mexican government in Canada. Through leaked documents, the union representing food workers in Canada, has found that the Mexican consulate is preventing union supporting Mexican migrant workers in British Columbia from returning to work in that province.
- According to media commentator, Dwayne Winseck, most of the editorial opinion found in corporate press backed Stephen Harper as prime minister in the lead up to the latest federal election. "Counting just the endorsements of specific candidates for Prime Minister (Harper, Layton, Ignatieff, Duceppe, May), we find a stunning 21 out of 22 backing Harper. In other words, 95 percent of editorial opinion has solidified behind Harper. This is almost three times his standing in the public mind, and in the last election," writes Winseck.
- A Wisconsin judge struck down Gov. Scott Walker's anti-union bill on May 27th. Judge Maryann Sumi said Republican legislators failed to provide sufficient public notice before passing the law in March. The law attempted to gut collective bargaining rights of state employees. The bill resulted in sustained massive protests in March with more than 100,000 people filling the streets of the state's capital Madison in one action described as Wisconsin's largest protest ever.