Sister Maudilia López shares her struggle with Goldcorp in Guatemala with Lawrence Wuest from Stanley at the Wolastoqiyik Grandmothers’ Camp on May 26. Photo by Tracy Glynn.

In a moving show of solidarity, more than three dozen people from Fredericton visited the Wolastoqiyik grandmothers’ camp in the woods near Napadogan on May 26.

Almost one year ago, the grandmothers established a permanent camp to defend their traditional hunting territory from the Sisson Mine project, which is proposed in the headwaters of the Nashwaak Watershed.

If built, HDI Northcliff’s Sisson Mine project would be one of the largest open-pit tungsten and molybdenum mines in the world. Experts from MiningWatch Canada have condemned the project as economically unfeasible with significant negative long-term environmental impacts.

“I was so surprised to look up and see all the vehicles coming down the road to help with the garden and longhouse,” said Andrea Poliches, one of the Wolastoqiyik grandmothers living at the camp.

The grandmothers have named the location of the camp, Macetchewik sipohsisol, which means “where the brooks begin” in the Wolastoq language. The camp is located where a huge tailings dam is proposed to contain the Sisson Mine’s waste.

The caravan of farmers, professors, students, writers and retirees travelled to the camp to help construct a traditional longhouse at precisely the location of the proposed open-pit mine, plant a raised bed vegetable garden, and donate food, supplies and money for the camp.

Sister Maudilia López, a Maya Mam Catholic nun resisting the Canadian mining company, Goldcorp, in San Miguel Ixtahuacán, Guatemala, was a visitor with the caravan to the camp. Goldcorp operated the Marlin mine in Guatemala to visit Fredericton over the past decade.

In 2006, Juan Tema, a farmer from Sipakapa, spoke to an audience in Fredericton about the farmers’ struggles against the Marlin mine.

In 2004 and 2005, Sipakapa farmers staged a 42-day blockade that stopped the mine’s trucks from passing through their community. The blockade violently ended when more than 1,200 soldiers and 400 police officers fired shots at the unarmed protesters, killing Raul Castillo Bocel, a farmer, and injuring many others.

Sr. López who is now dealing with the aftermath of the large-scale mining operation in her community was especially interested in learning how the Wolastoqiyik plan to stop the mine from starting operations.

Hart Perley, one of the Wolastoqiyik grandmothers, explained to Sr. López and the group gathered at the camp that she has written many letters, including to the Canadian Prime Minister, cabinet ministers responsible for indigenous affairs and the Queen of England to state her community’s opposition to the Sisson Mine project.

In her letters, Perley cites the Peace and Friendship treaties that never surrendered any land in New Brunswick away from the indigenous people. She also references numerous legal conventions dealing with indigenous people and consent, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

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Sr. López shared her community’s struggle with Goldcorp with the grandmothers and allies gathered in front of the solar-powered tiny home at the camp.

“I want indigenous people to fall in love with the Earth and their own roots, not just follow European and North American beliefs that have nothing to do with our culture,” Sr. López told the National Catholic Reporter in 2016.

Sr. López has been working with activists in the United Church of Canada’s Mining the Connections Working Group to get the church to stop investing its pension plan in Goldcorp.

Alan Hall, the United Church’s staff person responsible for the pension board, told Sr. López in a meeting, days before at the United Church’s Maritimes Conference in Sackville, that Goldcorp had resolved many of its problems with communities.

Sr. López challenged Hall’s positive depiction of the company’s actions by sharing the ongoing problems caused by the Goldcorp mine in her community, after which she received a standing ovation from the conference participants. Hall said he would study the information that she shared.

On the matter of divestment from Goldcorp, Kathryn Anderson, a member of the United Church’s Mining the Connections Working Group, says, “The church’s Pension Board is in opposition to the will of the church, strongly expressed at its last General Council in 2015.”

Sr. López is one of many Maya Mam people affected by Goldcorp’s Marlin mine in Guatemala to visit Fredericton over the past decade.

In 2015, Cresanta Perez, a Mayan Mam grandmother, discussed her community’s struggle with the Marlin mine on a panel about the criminalization of land defenders. Perez blamed the Marlin mine for shortages in water, cracks in homes, health problems and criminalization and violence against opponents.

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“Hart, you are my hero. You are my hero for being out here, defending the land,” Joan McFarland, a grandmother, economics professor at St. Thomas University and long-time solidarity activist with Guatemala, told Perley.

Tracy Glynn is a member of the Fredericton committee of the Maritimes Guatemalan Breaking the Silence Network.

Renewable energy projects make sense both economically and environmentally

By DALLAS McQuARRIE

While climate change makes the need to replace fossil fuels with alternative non-polluting sources of energy quite urgent, leadership in developing clean, renewable energy sources is not coming from the politicians. The versatility and value of renewable energy technologies is being demonstrated in everything from “do it yourself” projects to large and small commercial ventures.

For those who like the “do it yourself” approach, Bobby Pitre’s homemade solar panel shows what can be done.

Pitre lives in Collette, a rural community near Rogersville in Northumberland County.

A combination of “environmental considerations and rising heating costs” led Pitre to make a solar panel from pop cans to heat his garage. The garage, which Pitre also built, is 1,200 square feet, with a 12-foot high ceiling, Pitre’s solar panel consists of “60 columns of pop cans, with each column 15 pop cans high.” The solar panel is mounted on the south side of Pitre’s garage.

As well as producing free heat in the fall, winter and spring, Pitre’s solar heating panel is pollution free. Unlike shale gas and other fossil fuels, it doesn’t release greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, contaminate water sources or destroy land with toxic by-products.

Each of the 900 pop cans used in Pitre’s solar panel has its bottom removed and extra holes added to the top to allow the free passage of air through the cans. The pop cans are held together by a sealant, and painted a matte black to enable them to absorb more heat from the sun.

“Building a solar panel with 900 pop cans did take some time,” Pitre said, but he notes that two smaller pop can solar arrays have already been built in the Collette area. As well, members of Our Environment, Our Choice, a Kent County environmental group, have traveled to Collette to learn about generating pollution-free heat from sunshine and pop cans.

“It’s a great set up because the solar panel provides free heat wherever the sun is shining,” Pitre said.

“The disadvantage is that the heat is not regulated, so if it gets too hot, you have to open a window or provide a vent to the outside for the heated air.”

“I wanted to heat my garage as cheaply as possible, and a pop can solar panel does that,” at a small up-front cost. The initial cost is for a thermostat, fan and related switches that turn the unit on and off, and circulate the air. Once in place, Pitre said he uses “about half the electricity of a kitchen toaster” to run the fan and thermostat.

The fan pushes air from the garage into a duct along the bottom of Pitre’s solar panel. As sunlight heats up the black pop cans, the heated air rises to the top of the array and into another duct that brings the heated air into the garage.

Pitre estimates his pop can solar panel saves him about $100 a month when in use during the fall, winter and spring.

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Bobby Pitre from Collette built a solar heating panel from 900 pop cans to heat his 1,200 square foot garage for both economic and for environmental reasons. Photo by Dallas McQuarrie.

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Masuma Khan will study. A competitive advantage by being a cheaper workforce: the union "was determined to negotiate it into our collective agreement," the committee, has been an RSMC for more than 30 years. "competitive advantage." Inequities exist between the Rural and Suburban Mail Carrier Districts, an arbitration decision in early June recognized that pay inequities exist between the Rural and Suburban Mail Carrier Districts, an arbitration ruling will mean a pay raise for 360 workers in New Brunswick, mostly women. The largest union, an arbitration ruling will mean a pay raise for 360 workers in New Brunswick, mostly women. The completed study was reviewed by arbitrator Amy Anderson, president of the CUPW Acadie Bathurst Local Committee. The decision will affect more than 8,000 rural postal workers across Canada represented by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW). The Crown corporation posted a before-tax profit of $74 million last year when it closed the lower pay for RSMCs a "competitive advantage." Any Anderson, president of the CUPW Acadie Bathurst Local Committee and a member of the national CUPW negotiating committee, has been an RSMC for more than 30 years. Anderson said that CUPW has always believed that pay equity was a legal obligation of Canada Post. The union "was determined to negotiate it into our collective agreement, so our members did not have to wait for 20 to 30 years for justice and no longer be treated as a competitive advantage by being a cheaper workforce for the Corporation," in the last bargaining round for a new collective agreement, the union negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding to fast-track a pay equity study. The completed study was reviewed by arbitrator Maureen Flynn. In her decision, Flynn confirmed that the work of the rural and urban workers is of equal value and there is a pay gap, and she gave the parties until the end of August to negotiate the terms to resolve the inequity. The main items to be addressed include wages and benefits including disability, life insurance, post-retirement health and dental plans and other benefits. CUPW’s position is that the employees are entitled to the benefits but Canada Post wants cash payments instead. Anderson has worked with other activists for many years to improve the working conditions and rights of RSMCs, including unionization and jurisdiction. He believes that the RSMCs are entitled to the same economic and social rights as other workers and that the conditions in the rural and suburban areas are significantly different than those in the urban areas. The study was completed by a team of researchers led by Dr. Maureen Flynn, and it includes a review of the existing literature on pay equity, as well as interviews with RSMCs and other stakeholders. The study found that RSMCs are paid less than their urban counterparts, even after controlling for factors such as experience and seniority. The study also found that RSMCs face unique challenges due to their geographic location and the nature of their work, such as working in remote areas with limited access to services and resources. The study recommends that Canada Post agree to the recommendations of the study, including a pay equity plan that would provide for a progressive increase in pay over time, as well as other measures to improve working conditions and benefits for RSMCs. The study also calls for greater recognition and respect for the work of RSMCs, and for more investment in rural and suburban communities. The findings of the study will be presented to Canada Post and other stakeholders for discussion and action.