

The New Hip Scene: SMC's Project Green

By Jennifer Wake

Going Green. It has not only become a popular phrase in the mainstream media, but describes a movement on many college campuses reminiscent of the '60s. Saint Mary's College is no exception.

On April 18 more than 100 students, faculty, staff and Lamorinda residents entered the Saint Mary's campus on bikes, skateboards, or by foot as part of "Pedal for the Planet." The event – designed to promote alternate forms of transportation, help people measure their "carbon footprint," and learn ways to minimize their impact on the environment – was the fourth organized by Project Green, a student-run organization created last summer to promote sustainability on campus.

The organization was formed by Saint Mary's student John Stratton, who began a quest for personal change in the summer of 2006, asking Associate Dean of Liberal Arts Shawny Anderson for help.

"I told Shawny, 'I want to become a hippie'," said Stratton, who was seeking ways to be more environmentally responsible. "This prompted a few brainstorming sessions on what we could do to make SMC more sustainable. We thought that an organization which incorporated all aspects of sustainability would be an efficient and effective strategy."

Project Green's three main goals?

*Recycling,
composting, and
organic foods.*

The fledgling group spent much of the first semester researching ways to tackle issues, finding the right people to contact, and figuring out ways to create programs and put on events. Composting proved the most daunting task, so the group focused first on recycling. Kaitlin Caruso, one of the Project Green coordinators, says it has been a huge success.

"We didn't have any organized recycling in any dorms on campus," said Caruso. "In the beginning of the year we got a grant and designed a recycling program for freshmen, since they live on campus and will be here the longest." The group purchased large 50-gallon tubs for each hall, with smaller receptacles for each dorm room. The bins are light enough to be moved around campus.

In February, the group kicked off the recycling program with Trash Day. After the breakfast period in Oliver Hall, the half-ton of trash collected was thrown under a tree in Dante Quad to show how much waste occurs after just one meal. Project Green coordinators explained to those gathered that two-thirds of the two-tons of trash produced each day could either be composted or recycled.

"I've learned how much we waste on campus and how much energy we use," Project Green member Marie Conner said. "We have an option of taking hard plastic cups or paper cups for our drinks, so we emphasized that taking the [reusable] plastic is one way to reduce waste. Being part of this has made me much more aware of things I use."

In addition to the student-run organization, the administration has taken additional steps to become "greener." In September 2005, the college began efforts to reduce its energy consumption by 71 kilowatts under a new energy conservation program, new buildings on campus are being built to environmentally friendly standards, and courses such as "Earth and Environmental Responsibility in the Global Community" address environmental issues and offer students ways to take personal responsibility.

"We've learned about the importance of energy conservation, but also how we are responsible," said Project Green member Kristen Thomsen. "The majority of the class had no idea what was going on. We talked a lot about how we can contact state representatives."

For now, Project Green coordinator Kyle Broderud says everyone

can start by simply turning off the lights and TV when leaving a room. "This can save more energy than people think," he said. "And (if they have the budget) eating locally-grown organic foods greatly reduces our carbon emissions."

Because of the high cost of organic foods, Project Green was only able to incorporate organic foods in the dining hall on a rotating basis. In the future, they hope to create small, organic permaculture gardens around campus for students, faculty, staff and the Lamorinda community to use.

"[In addition to the garden,] long-term projects include solar energy sustainability, and the reduction of paper/plastic products used on campus," said Broderud. "We also hope to set up a recycling program in every building on campus. Until we eliminate our waste all together, we can always recycle more, eat better, reduce waste, save energy, and many other things."

Founder John Stratton is proud of the success and support that Project Green has received from the college and the local community. "It has given students an organization to help them take actions behind their beliefs."

For more information about Project Green or the SMC Sustainability initiatives, visit <http://sustainsmc.stmarys-ca.edu/>.



Recycle bins on campus

Photo by Jennifer Wake



Project Green members Marie Conner and Corinne Simpson spread the word."

Photo by Jennifer Wake



Project Green collected trash from one breakfast in dining hall.

Photo by Kaitlin Caruso