

April 20

## Sustain Mid Mainemodel for democracy

Marilyn Canavan served as a state representative p

Anthropologist Margaret Mead created plenty of controversy in her day; but on one score, she was indisputably right. "Never doubt," she said, "that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Evidence of that truism is writ large in history. Just 50 years ago, a small army of black and white Americans led by Martin Luther King succeeded in upending laws that for decades had denied equality to black Americans. Likewise, a few dedicated women provided the impetus for passage of the law that finally gave women the right to vote.

Today, Mead's words still ring true. Citizens at the grass roots level continue to be a powerful force for change, and you don't have to look far afield to find them. In 2009, 65 Central Maine citizens met in Waterville to explore ways in which they could help improve the quality of life for the people of their communities. Their discussion focused primarily on our nation's increasing dependence on the use of foreign oil, the looming problem of climate change, and recycling issues. In light of the current spike in oil prices, it's clear they were way ahead of the curve.

The group put their heads together and for three days, shared their (sometimes) diverse views, and actually listened to one another. This was no small feat considering who they are. They include the well-to-do and the not so well-to-do. They are teachers, counselors, college professors, farmers, laborers, retirees and businessfolk and a score of other occupations and professions. They are men and women, young and old, and among their ranks they count Democrats, Republicans, and independents. And strange as it seems in an era where consensus is becoming an archaic term, when the forum ended, the group had agreed on many things.

They developed an action plan and Vision Statement which sets forth an outline of what they hope the Central Maine area will look like in years to come if we work together to create a culture that is less dependent on fossil fuels, if we support sustainability in such things as use of local food, energy, and transportation, and if we work to preserve our natural resources.

They named themselves the Sustain Mid Maine Coalition and formed several teams, each of which is committed to achieving specific goals. These include: 1.) to educate members of the public about the meaning and purpose of sustainability, 2.) to reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, 3.) to grow and support local foods 4) to improve transportation efficiencies and choices, 5) to encourage the practice of recycling.

Their agenda was an ambitious one for a largely volunteer group; but in just three years time, the commitment and sweat equity of each team has brought about some pretty remarkable results which you'll be hearing about soon. In the meantime, I hope you'll consider joining

forces with the SMMC folks and learn what you can do to help improve the quality of life for our children and grandchildren. You can reach them at their website: [www.sustainmidmaine.org](http://www.sustainmidmaine.org).

For too long we've relied on fossil fuels to heat our homes and food grown in California and Chile to feed our families. For too long we've been blind to the problem of overburdened landfills and have overlooked the benefit of recycling. And for too long we've postponed that home energy audit. We can't wait for Washington or Augusta to solve all our problems or for politicians to decide what's best for the folks in Central Maine. We're the deciders. Everyone one of us can help create a more sustainable culture whether it be by planting back yard gardens, cutting back on the use of fossil fuels, supporting our local businesses, or shopping with reusable containers.

Some of the most significant changes in history came about when small groups of people saw a need for change, mobilized folks at the grass roots level, persisted in their efforts, and then finally achieved their goals -- sometimes against great odds. It's called democracy. Sustain Mid Maine is a perfect model for how it works.

Marilyn Canavan served as a state representative prior to serving on the Board of Directors of the Sustain Mid Maine Coalition.

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