

# UPTOWN

## The future is green

After 38 years, is Earth Day more relevant than ever before? Marlo Campbell finds out

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Green. The word itself has become synonymous with eco-friendliness and environmental stewardship, and the issues that fall under its broad umbrella have undeniably captured the attention of people around the world, including those of us living right here in Winnipeg.

From the recent Earth Hour initiative to the proposed ban on plastic bags; from the debate over rapid transit to the newly announced provincial climate change plan, Winnipeggers don't have to look very far for local examples of the global trend in action.

Given the renewed interest in all things green, it could be argued that Earth Day - observed on April 22 in over 180 countries around the world - has never been more relevant.

First launched in the U.S. in 1970, Earth Day is considered by some to be the birth of the environmental movement - a time to educate ourselves about the ecological challenges facing our planet, celebrate our successes in changing things for the better, and reflect on the work that's still left to do.

Mark Miller, the coordinator of Earth Day 2008 for Manitoba, says it's an ideal time for people to learn more about the issues, and about how to be a part of the solution.

"A 'window of awareness' is what we call it," he explains. "There's lots of work to be done yet. People have to look at their carbon footprint (and) I don't think we're well-educated - people hear the term all the time, but I don't think people know how to calculate it."

Maybe not, but in the fight to save the planet, it seems Winnipeggers have embraced at least one green weapon.

Darryl Drohomerski, Winnipeg's supervisor of waste diversion, says the volume of recyclable material that's dropped off each day at the city's Material Recovery Facility (MRF) - a large warehouse on Henry Avenue - has grown by about 5% in the last two years.

The MRF receives between 100 and 200 tons of newspaper, plastic, cardboard and glass every single day - an enormous haul that never fails to shock people when they see it for the first time, Drohomerski says.

"It's eyes popping out of their head. They have no idea that the one blue box they put out on their collection day equals that."

The mound of material is first loaded onto a conveyor belt where it's manually picked through by workers who remove anything non-recyclable. It's then sorted by machines, compressed into bales, and sold to companies around the world. A one-ton bale of newspaper goes for about \$110, while a bale of plastic can sell for as much as \$550.

The entire operation costs about \$9.4 million a year to run. About \$3.6 million is recouped in sales, with provincial levies making up the difference.

"If we break even, we're quite happy. If it costs us a little bit of money but it's diverting material from our landfill, overall, that's saving money for the city as well," Drohomerski says.

Drohomerski says he's actually seen less of a buzz around Earth Day in the last few years, but notes that regardless of whether Winnipeggers are attending events, our behaviours are definitely shifting. As proof, he points to the growing popularity of LED lights, composters, and reusable bags, and notes that certain areas of the city - particularly newer neighborhoods - now have a 100% participation rate in Winnipeg's blue box program.

"Certainly, I think people are a lot more in tune with what's the right thing to do," he says, adding: "I think there's a lot of pressure from their children, who are learning it in school."

Miller agrees.

"Youth are always the first," he says. "Our youth really need to be developed and encouraged... If we teach our youth these methods, they'll be ingrained in them as they grow, so it can only get better."

That's exactly what a local theatre company has been doing since 1991.

The mandate of Winnipeg's Green Kids Inc. is "environmental education for young people through theatre." Each year, the non-profit group develops an ecologically themed play (suitable for Grades 1 through 6) that's performed in schools. It also creates a free teachers' resource kit for each of its productions so that educators can incorporate the shows' green messages into their curriculums (go to [www.greenkids.com](http://www.greenkids.com) for more information).

This season's offering, a vaudevillian comedy called Palais Oops!, explores concepts such as carbon footprinting, sustainable living, resource management and the ecological costs associated with meat - a far cry from the early years, says tour manager Daina Leitold, when Green Kids used its plays to teach the basics of recycling.

In contrast, she says today's kids are already aware of the situation.

"Now, we're not trying to teach them something they don't know - we're reinforcing," she says.

The subject matter is grim at times, but Leitold says the goal is to empower children through music and humour to make smart choices, not scare them with doom-and-gloom predictions of the future.

"We want to present the idea of (the problem) being solvable," she says. "It comes down to the small steps that kids can make, and we try to allow them to feel responsible, because in truth, they are."

### Earth Day Event Roundup

Want to recognize Earth Day? Several environmentally themed events will be taking place on and around April 22.

#### SATURDAY APRIL 20

##### **Oak Hammock Marsh** 1 Snow Goose Bay at Hwy 220

Events will be taking place from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m., and will include an enviroscape demonstration (1 p.m.), a play about healthy lakes (2 p.m.), nature films and slides, and a one-hour, guided walk through the marsh, as well as crafts, displays and face painting.

For more information call 467-3283 or go to [oakhammockmarsh.ca](http://oakhammockmarsh.ca).

##### **FortWhyte Alive** 1961 McCreary Rd.

The first heat of an ecoadventure race will depart at 8:30 a.m., with participants using "people-powered transportation" to race 42 km.

Other events, taking place from 1 p.m. until 4 p.m., include canoe rides, guided, 45-minute hikes, face painting, a climbing wall, and live bluegrass music by Aaron Burnett, as well as info booths and displays.

Anyone who arrives on foot or by bicycle or bus will get a free gift, and FortWhyte Alive will have two special bus stops operating: jump on at noon at the U of W Portage Ave. stop, or at 12:30 p.m. at Polo Park (at the #78 bus stop in the loop); both buses will leave FortWhyte at 4 p.m.

For more information, go to [www.fortwhyte.org](http://www.fortwhyte.org)

#### TUESDAY & WEDNESDAY, APRIL 22 & 23

##### **Climate Change Conference & Earth Forum** Victoria Inn, 1808 Wellington Ave.

This two-day event will feature speakers, workshops and presentations on topics such as alternative fuels, wind energy, sustainable agricultural practices, and green buildings, along with a trade show.

On Tuesday night from 7 to 9 p.m., a free public forum on alternative energy will take place, chaired by former Manitoba Premier Ed Schreyer.

Winnipeggers interested in attending the rest of the conference can register online at [www.climateforum.ca](http://www.climateforum.ca), or by contacting [mopia@mts.net](mailto:mopia@mts.net) or calling 338-0804. Both days start at 7 a.m. and run until 6:30 p.m. - two-day participation costs \$135 (\$40 for students); one-day participation costs \$80 (\$20 for students).

#### SATURDAY, APRIL 27

##### **Living Prairie Museum** 2795 Ness Ave.

Events will be taking place from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m., and will include the final judging of a waste reduction photo contest, a cell-phone drop-off, a crocus sale, displays and presentations, live music and more.

Call 832-0167 for more information, or go to [www.winnipeg.ca/publicworks/naturalist/livingprairie](http://www.winnipeg.ca/publicworks/naturalist/livingprairie)

To learn more about the types of environmental programs currently operating in Manitoba, and to find out what you can do to reduce your waste and conserve energy and water, check out [www.greenmanitoba.ca](http://www.greenmanitoba.ca).

