

UBC Res Sustainability Conference

UBYSSEY - Larisa Karr, January 19, 2010

Res sustainability conference features local groups

Sustainability was the hot topic of the evening at the “Refresh, Rethink, Renew” conference held at the Marine Drive residences on Saturday night.

Sponsored by Marine Residence Life, Marine Drive Resident Association and the Marine Drive Sustainability Representative, the conference featured a sustainability fair, where many environmental organizations and eco-friendly businesses from BC and UBC set up booths promoting everything from all-natural spice blends to tree-growing kits.

“I wanted to hold this conference because I feel like there’s a lot of organizations within UBC and Vancouver that don’t really about each other, so the conference provides a lot of networking opportunities for people to come together, share ideas and collaborate,” said Monique Smith, head coordinator of “Refresh, Rethink, Renew.”

One of the featured booths belonged to Farm Folk/City Folk, a not-for-profit organization focusing on promoting small-scale sustainable agriculture in BC whose primary goals include educating people about eating locally-grown food and food security.

“Locally-grown food is important because it has less of a carbon footprint,” said Brian Harris, an agricultural photographer for Farm Folk/City Folk. “It’s also important that we have secure access to our own food. As we go further down the road of industrialized food systems, the control of our food is in the hands of a very few, very powerful, industrial system of people. “It’s not only about the geographic impact, but the loss of control over our food systems.”

The conference also featured three speakers, a variety of organic and free trade food, and flamenco dancing.

Judy Fainstein was the keynote speaker of the night. One of two hundred Canadians trained by Al Gore for Climate Project Canada, Fainstein is the president and CEO of YesBC!, a non-profit youth leadership organization aimed at providing direct involvement in sustainability programs for elementary, middle, and high school children across BC.

“Young people need to be empowered about climate change and have the tools and resources to do so,” said Fainstein. “They need to be shown that they can make a difference sustainably, and Yes!BC provides them with direct opportunities through awareness campaigns and leadership roles.”

Common Energy and Oxfam UBC also gave presentations about their organizations. Common Energy is a student-organized organization at UBC whose platform stresses finding solutions to take equitable climate action through fostered dialogues and reducing campus waste.

Oxfam’s presentation primarily addressed how climate change affects people in poverty through droughts, flooding and deforestation. As well, they highlighted how the organization

strives to raise awareness about human rights, HIV/AIDS awareness, and gender equality through aid and relief work.

Smith cites a mentality of convenience as a primary limitation in becoming sustainable.

“The obstacles are ourselves. A lot of people believe it’s simply more convenient to drive their car than ride a bike or throw something in the garbage rather than compost,” she said. “If we change our mindsets of convenience and rethink our values, there will be less barriers to becoming sustainable.”