

San Antonians devise 'green' resolutions for the new year

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Don Hester cares not one whit for plastic grocery bags, and this year the retired computer consultant aims to delete them from his daily life.

"What really aggravates me is when I go to the grocery store and they give me 10 bags to carry five items," he says.

In 2008, Hester, who volunteers regularly at Mitchell Lake Audubon Center, plans to carry his groceries home in reusable cloth totes. He's purchased some from his grocery store, and he reuses canvas bags acquired at conferences he's attended — another bit of recycling.

"That's my No. 1 resolution," he says.

Thinking green is on the minds of many San Antonians. When challenged to come up with eco-minded goals for 2008, folks offered a range of ideas to put into action at work and at home.

Guz, who last year installed a drip irrigation system in her landscape's bedding areas, resolves to remember to bring her canvas bags into the store.

"Other staff here told me that remembering to change habits and put bags in or out of the car is the hardest part. Maybe my kids can nag me into it so I won't forget," she adds.

Getting the family involved in green living is also the strategy of Judy Temple, a mom and part-time worker who lives with her husband and two school-age children.

Members of the Temple family are already active proponents of recycling materials at hand, such as using paper bags for making crafts and for holding garbage.

"In 2008, we'll also look at ways to cut back on the amount of waste we generate and reduce the amount of waste that comes in," Temple says. That means the family is on track to cover the three legs of the waste reduction motto: reduce, reuse, recycle.

Living in an older home in the Terrell Heights neighborhood has given Temple plenty of opportunity to make improvements in energy efficiency.

"We wish CPS would give us rebates for insulating our attic," notes Temple, who says she believes strongly that government should take a greater role in promoting energy efficiency.

Weatherizing an older home is an ongoing project for Rachel and George Christilles, who live in La Coste. They've already made a number of energy-saving improvements to their 60-year-old home. Last year, for example, they installed gaskets behind outlet covers and switch plates, a quick and inexpensive step that makes a difference, Rachel Christilles says.

In 2008, the plan is to replace the single-paned windows. "You can feel the air coming through those windows in the winter," she says.

Silver Stars forward Erin Buescher has the seed of an idea for reducing the use of plastic in her professional life — and it's something all her teammates could adopt.

"After we play games we ice our backs, shoulders, knees with ice that we wrap with plastics. And we use a lot of plastic for this purpose, every game," Buescher says.

In the coming season, she is encouraging teammates to reduce the use of plastic, perhaps by having their own material for applying ice, something they reuse after every game.

Raising awareness and taking action on behalf of one's community is also on the mind of environmental activist Bill Sinkin. As chairman of Solar San Antonio, a nonprofit center advocating sustainable technologies, Sinkin spends his days promoting solar energy in projects throughout Bexar County and the city.

And at home at The Forum in Lincoln Heights, an independent living center, Sinkin is effecting change. "We've started a petition," Sinkin says. "They have about 200 people (living) there, and we're determined to get them an energy audit and put in the correct kind of bulbs and automatic motion sensors."

For many San Antonians, work life and home life share the same environmental commitment.

Anita Ledbetter, executive director of Metropolitan Partnership for Energy, is also walking the talk. Her organization advocates sound energy policy for a partnership of government, utility, transit and advocacy organizations and oversees the residential green building program in San Antonio.

Ledbetter is brimming with workplace goals, which include educating the public about green building and the environment.

Cathy Hopkins, a soup maker at Cappy's Restaurant, plans to use more locally grown products at home in the coming year. She is already anticipating "going to the farmers market when it starts up again in the spring." Hopkins also takes home vegetable trimmings from work to add to her home compost pile.

Architect Michael Rey of Overland Partners plans to take and pass the latest LEED exam. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. According to the U.S. Green Building Council, LEED-certified professionals have "a thorough understanding of green building practices and principles and the LEED Rating System."

Rey is also dedicated to the home-improvement route toward greener living. His plans include installing gutters and rain catchment barrels at home.

"My wife and I are adamant about educating our children on reducing water consumption, waste, recycling and other basics that we feel are important for them to learn," he adds.

Paul Gates, a second-grade teacher at Madison Elementary in the San Antonio Independent School District, literally grows his own lessons.

Gates has incorporated the science of gardening into his lessons for the past 20 years. At Madison, Gates oversees a vegetable garden, herb garden, a greenhouse and a wildlife area.

"My resolution about making things green is getting my students to understand that whole concept," he says. "It's not just what can I do, but what can I do that can affect many more people than myself."

"Time to reinvest in the Earth," says the Rev. Rob Mueller, of Divine Redeemer-El Divino Redentor Presbyterian Church. "If there is one thing I would really like to do better this coming year, it is to tend the garden, which, for me is a very green decision," says Mueller, who says he's let his vegetable and flower gardens go.

Improving the environment for the enjoyment of the community is the resolution of Our Lady of the Lake University President Tessa Martinez Pollack, who plans to work with OLLU's neighbors to revitalize Elmendorf Lake, "the front-door entrance to OLLU."

"Going paperless" is the goal at the Phyllis Browning Realty Co. Browning, according to the company's founder and CEO, Phyllis Browning. "Four or five" of the company's 160 agents are already paperless, she says, and more are getting the training to reduce the use of paper at their offices.

"The best New Year's resolution for all of us is simply to make others more aware of the small adjustments we could each make to secure a better future for everyone," concludes architect Rey.