

November 7, 2007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Environmental Conference Calls Hamilton Teenagers to Action

Event Scheduled for Nov 8, Mohawk College "I" Wing - 9:00 – 3:00

HAMILTON - "Younger generations need to become better educated about their impact on the environment if they are to understand what they can do to protect the planet." That is the message from Quinn Runkle, a 16-year-old B.C. student, who will address students from Hamilton's 27 high schools tomorrow morning. "As a high school student in B.C. I am able to learn new things about my world every day. But, sustainability, climate change, and renewable resources are not part of my education."

Ms. Runkle will be the keynote speaker at Hamilton Community Foundation's third annual *Living the Environment* conference, hosted by its Youth Advisory Council (YAC) in partnership with Mohawk College and McMaster University's Ontario Public Interest Research Group. At a young age, Ms. Runkle already boasts an impressive environmental record. She has participated in the United Nations Children's Conference on the Environment and traveled to the Antarctic on an expedition to learn about climate change. She calls her Antarctic experience a wake-up call that spurred her to share her passion about the environment and the difference an individual can make.

"Once younger generations are educated about what is happening in our world they will be able to understand the actions our planet needs," says Ms. Runkle. "These attitudes and actions will carry with them into their households, and eventually into the work world. It is much easier to work up through a generation than trying to work down through big corporations "

Living the Environment enables some 100 high school students and their teachers from across Hamilton to learn more about environmental issues through hands-on workshops. The conference also launches HCF's annual Protecting Our Environment Together ("POET") youth grants which enable students to plan and carry out their own projects to improve the environment over the school year. Grants of up to \$700 each are available to area high-schools for youth-led initiatives.

As a result of last year's POET youth grants, students across Hamilton turned their ideas into environmental action through 23 student projects. These ranged from a garden showcasing indigenous species at Cathedral High School, to a vermiculture initiative at Parkside High showing how recycling food waste can become a viable alternative to purchased compost, to a landfill diversion program at Hamilton District Christian High which also helped to support the school's projects in the third world.

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“Virtually every school in Hamilton is participating this year, which is absolutely amazing” says YAC adult advisor Linda Hughes. “It’s proof of the growing concern about the environment among our youth, and their interest in playing an active role in protecting it. Through the workshops and speakers these kids are inspired with ideas for helping the planet, and the grant opportunities can provide the means to implement them.”

Living the Environment workshops carry the theme of “Ideas into Action”, including presentations from local environmental experts on how to audit your trash, transform your school grounds into learning grounds, start your own environmental club and act on alternatives to idling.

A lunchtime fashion show features “Revolution Wear” by Sapphire Singh, a local artist whose interest in waste reduction has led her to reuse, reinvent and recreate second hand clothing and salvaged objects into functional wearable art.

Hamilton Community Foundation receives funds from generous citizens, invests those funds to generate income, and makes grants to support a wide range of local charities, including arts and heritage, education, the environment, health and social services. It brings people together to convene solutions to some of Hamilton’s most pressing challenges, such as environmental protection, neighbourhood revitalization and poverty.

HCF’s Youth Advisory Council (YAC) provides young people age 13 to 21 with an opportunity to work together with HCF as they raise funds and make grants in our community to benefit other youth. YAC members learn about Hamilton’s strengths and needs, get involved in the community, gain leadership and provide a youth perspective to HCF’s work.

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Backgrounder Attached

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BACKGROUNDER

- The conference takes place 9:00 to 3:30 on Thursday, November 8 in the “I” wing of Mohawk College
- McMaster University’s Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) and Mohawk College are partners in the event
- HCF’s Youth Advisory Council is a group of student volunteers from high schools across Hamilton who provide leadership and advice to HCF on youth-related issues. The “YAC” provides leadership experience, community involvement, and the promotion of youth philanthropy. YAC members work with the HCF’s board and staff to develop funds and make community grants that benefit other youth.

CONFERENCE AGENDA

- Quinn Runkle’s keynote address on A Call to Action takes place at 9:30 a.m.
- The Revolution Wear presentation by Sapphire Singh takes place at 12:45

THE WORKSHOPS

- ***Ideas into Action, Quinn Runkle:*** From trash-free lunches to stream clean-ups to forming an environmental club teens will learn how to get the plans off the ground for making the world greener.
- ***Transforming School Grounds into Learning Grounds, Dennis Wendland, Evergreen School Ground Greening Consultant, Waterloo Region:*** School grounds are designed on an industrial model that is over 50 years old. Times have changed. This workshop will show simple, low-cost yet effective changes to make school grounds greener and sustainable.
- ***The New School Roof – Solar Panels and Windmills SWITCH (Solar and Wind Initiatives Towards Change) William Lyon Mackenzie, Collegiate students, Toronto:*** Students will hear how youth from this Toronto school jumped in and decided their school roof should be covered with energy-generating solar panels and wind turbines.
- ***Warning: May Inspire Action...or Starting Your Own Environmental Club, Sapphire Singh, Revolution Wear:*** A step-by-step interactive “how-to” that includes an introduction to gorilla gardening and the creation of a “Seed Bomb” symbolizing the potential for getting others inspired about the environment.
- ***Idling Stinks; Action on the Alternatives! Thom Oommen, Green Venture:*** From installing secure bike racks to challenging teachers to give up their cars one day a week, this workshop gives students alternatives for promoting active and sustainable transportation.
- ***The Race to Renew and How to Audit Your Trash, Dennis Guy, City of Hamilton:*** Students will join the GSI (Garbage Scene Investigator) crew and learn how to figure out where garbage comes from, who put it there, and how to divert it from landfill in the future.
- ***“Climate Change Presents....” Julia Kollek, Environment Hamilton:*** With real-life facts and everyday props, students put their lifestyles on stage and create a skit with a climate change message.
- ***Teachers’ Caucus – Making Things Happen, Brian Lennox, Vice Principal, Saltfleet District High School, Bobbi Duncan, teacher, Waterdown High School:*** This interactive workshop for teachers shows ways to get students involved in local environmental projects and initiatives they consider important.

For more information on *Living the Environment 3* please contact Linda Hughes, Adult Advisor, Youth Advisory Council, Hamilton Community Foundation, 905-523-5600 or 905-531-3463.

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