

Communities Working Together to Improve the Environment

Greening Greater Racine

The 24/7 news cycle almost always presents negative stories about terrible things happening in our communities, our country, and our world. And, yes, there are certainly terrible things happening.

But many good things happen every day. We just don't hear about them.

Many people and organizations across the country are making genuine progress increasing the well-being of their communities from the bottom up

One positive example of this is what is going on in the Greater Racine area. Racine, Wisconsin sits along the western shores of Lake Michigan between Milwaukee to the north and Chicago to the South.

One group doing positive things from the bottom up is called Greening Greater Racine. Greening Greater Racine (GGR) is bringing together a broad range of organizations which impact the environment of our area. At these meetings, the organizations are learning from each other, coordinating their efforts, and celebrating their successes.

The GGR movement sprung from Racine Green Congregations, an ecumenical group which formed in 2014. Green Congregations' initial purpose was to share ideas and successes in making their own places of worship more energy efficient. Much has been accomplished along those lines.

Then, based on the broader environmental concerns shared by all worship groups in the community, Green Congregations helped lead the formation of the larger Greening Greater Racine movement. I helped that organization get formally organized and obtain IRS approval as a not for profit corporation.

The informal mantra of Greening Greater Racine is: Inform...Inspire...Celebrate!

From an *information* standpoint, we have all been amazed about how many good things are already happening in our community every day. Good people and good organizations are making a positive difference to quality of life from social, economic, and environmental perspectives.

From an *inspiration* standpoint, it lifts all of our spirits to meet and work with so many people who are already making a positive difference. As we get to know each other better, build trust, and see new possibilities for future accomplishments, we see genuine progress being made and are filled with hope.

From a *celebration* standpoint, we make it a point to not take for granted the good work that is already being done to make our community a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

One example of this spirit of celebration first happened in the Spring of 2016 and has been repeated in successive Springs. Greening Greater Racine worked with our local community college, Gateway Technical College, to host EcoFest. 60 plus organizations set up informative and interactive displays of their environmental work at the community college. 700 people (adults and children) visited EcoFest the first year. Over 1,000 people of all ages attended the second year and subsequent years. People were simply amazed regarding the many positive programs that are already going on. Many have been inspired to join these efforts.

Here are some pictures from the first EcoFest event.



A father and his two children checking out a Tower Garden, one of the 60+ plus environmental displays.



Some of the 1,000 people of all ages checking out the 60+ environmental displays at EcoFest.

Another local effort which has grown substantially over the last several years is the Racine Sustainable Business Network. Though there are some business which are working to roll back environmental regulations, the Racine Sustainable Business Network (RSBN) provides area businesses and other organizations with resources to enhance their environmental and economic impact while fostering employee and community well-being. The work to help make Racine County to be a vibrant community sharing a common commitment to protect the earth while enjoying a thriving economy.