

Students meet with environmental organizations at SURGE conference

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Contributing Writer

On February 5, students came together along with 131 local, national, and international organizations to discuss the state of the world. SURGE (Students United for a Responsible Global Environment) coordinated the event on the UNC Chapel Hill campus, but also had participation from other colleges and universities such as Meredith College, Warren Wilson College in Asheville, NCSU, Duke University, and Appalachian State. This massive conference was an attempt to bring thinking students up to speed on the activities of organizations that represent sustainability.

Many people began to recognize the obvious several years ago: The ways in which we use the earth and the people on it is not sustainable, now or into the future. SURGE recognizes that building sustainable healthy communities starts at home, but doesn't end at the county line. The global impacts we have on human-

ity and on the environment outside of the continental United States, are inextricably linked to our day to day consumption of resources.

Workshops, films, and seminars focused on the interconnectedness of the globe and the social condition of the people that live on it. Workshops brought together representatives of organizations to present the latest news and views from various fields of interest, such as: Developing renewable energy sources, establishing a fair trade agenda, clean transportation, sustainable agriculture, the future in Palestine, Israel, and Iraq, balance and accuracy in journalism, womens' rights in the 21st century, organic agriculture and pesticides, and students building sustainable campuses.

Our massive per person consumption of everything from gasoline to groceries drains resources from whatever we touch. We know that we consume oil, and that we are at the mercy of oil producing countries in regards to how much money they choose to make on our

consumption. Oil is a nasty business from start to finish. Pulling it out of the earth destroys the environment it came from. Tankers splash their poison from one end of the globe to the other, killing countless animals on the way to its destination. Oil processing and turning it into gasoline pollutes the areas for miles around storage facilities, and it is no surprise that nothing, plant or animal, survives near these processing tanks. We burn these fossil fuels and warm the globe, and we call this living.

Making our environmental resources sustainable has actually become do-able. The speakers and presenters from multiple organizations celebrated the good news about sustainable energy projects here in North Carolina and across the country. Chapel Hill's Million Solar Roofs, Southern Energy Management, and NC W.A.R.N. elaborated on the huge success of new photo-voltaic panels that are powering local buildings and businesses. Students from UNC Chapel Hill and Duke University are

riding local buses using the bio-diesel that they helped develop, and NCSU is not far behind. People driving hybrid cars present one of the best arguments for sustainable technologies: saving energy saves not only the environments we live in. It also saves us money that we would have given away to the fossil producers.

People who recognize a lack of sustainability also recognize that our consumption is not limited to oil. Oxfam, the Institute for Southern Studies, the Carolina Farm Stewardship Council and countless other organizations brought the latest information to light on the status of issues such as social justice, globalization, sustainable and organic agriculture.

Students from Warren Wilson College spoke of the environmental leadership approach they have taken to making their campus sustainable. Their EcoDorm is a state of the art architectural triumph. Resources used to build the new dorm incorporated sustainable materials, and the students living in the

dorm are committed to sharing their successes. Using natural light through walls of windows, collecting rain-water, and using sustainable materials and technologies have made their EcoDorm a living example of what can be done well, and done right when students put their minds to it. State schools and universities such as UNC and NCSU have adopted sustainability coordinators, and have seen enormous cost savings by implementing sustainable technology ideas on campus. Duke University has saved so much money that they have put their sustainability coordinator, a recent Duke graduate, on the university payroll. Universities and businesses have begun to realize that energy independence is an investment with a future. Whereas sustainable technologies payoff in the present tense while investing in our future, fossil fuels are being seen for what they are represent for the future - dinosaurs.

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