

Industry & the ENVIRONMENT

A SPECIAL INFORMATION FEATURE

CALGARY HERALD

TUESDAY, JUNE 5

Grassroots change

Mother, son up for Emerald awards

BY KAREN RUDOLPH DURRIE
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

It starts with a seed that takes root, sending up the tender shoot of a blade. Then it spreads, affecting everything around it.

Grassroots may be a well-used term when it comes to environmentally based movements, but it's an apt analogy.

And for two Calgarians, grassroots work has spurred positive change, influencing everything from city departments and agricultural practices to education.

Polly Knowlton Cockett and her son Rowan Cockett are passionate about environmental stewardship and sustainability.

Polly, a geologist and science teacher currently working on a doctorate in environmental education at the University of Calgary, is a board member with the Grassroots N.W. Environmental Awareness Society.

Rowan, 19, just completed his first year at the U of C studying environmental science, and has grown up in a household where respect for the environment, a love of outdoors, conservation and recycling have been strongly emphasized.

Both mother and son are among nominees for Alberta Emerald Foundation Awards this year.

The Grassroots society is nominated in the Community Group category for its Northland Farmers' Market — which for 15 years and counting has promoted local growers, farmers, food processors and crafters — and for its extensive community work.

Rowan is nominated in the Youth category for a three-year project he undertook monitoring, documenting and mapping invasive grass species in Whispering Woods, a natural park in the city's northwest.

The Alberta Emerald Awards are given out each year to enhance environmental awareness and celebrate environmental excellence.

Polly — who was immediately impressed by Grassroots when she first moved to Calgary in 1995 — is buoyed by the sense of community the group's work fosters.

"The volunteers are all connected to the environment, and to each other. These are people with vision, who individually and collectively have been able to act before the major organizations have," she says.

The volunteer-based group, for example organized large-scale recycling drives before the city implemented bins.

The group also publishes environmental education resources for teachers and children, supports green projects for schools and non-profit groups and sponsors anti-idling clinics.

It pushed the Recycling Council of Alberta to include juice boxes and Tetra Pak containers in deposit-refundable recyclables, and it organized the city's first mid-week farmers' market.

The Northland Farmers' Market was created to encourage people to buy locally grown, farmed and created foods and crafts.

Buying locally supports smaller organizations and promotes sustainable local agriculture, as well as forging important relationships between consumers and producers, says Polly.

"You can talk directly to the people who grow vegetables and get a sense of what the practices are, and ask questions," she says. "In turn, the producers of food and bread understand what their clients want."

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Rowan Cockett is nominated for an Alberta Emerald Award for a three-year project on invasive grass species in Whispering Woods, while mother Polly Knowlton Cockett is a board member of the Grassroots N.W. Environmental Awareness Society, nominated for its Northland Farmers' Market.

Alberta punches back in environmental dust-up

BY ROB PETKAU
FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Alberta is Canada's favourite environmental punching bag, but many of those shots are below the belt, says University of Calgary professor Bob Page.

Alberta's industries are taking action, he says — from the oilsands of the far northeast to the wind farms of the far southwest.

"I'd argue we don't get enough credit for what we're doing," says Page, who holds the U of C's new professorship of environmental management and sustainability, sponsored by TransAlta Corp.

"But on the other hand, we still have a long way to go. It's not a matter of resting on our laurels.

"It's not commercial to adopt all of these measures yet, but a lot of hard work is being done, so that five, 10 years from now, we'll be able to lower our emissions and our environmental impact significantly."

In the meantime, Canadian oil companies have made significant strides in reducing their environmental footprint, says Brian Maynard, vice-president of stewardship and public affairs for

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the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers (CAPP).

Alberta's oil and gas industry has achieved a 72 per cent reduction in solution gas flaring since 1996, and a 59 per cent reduction in solution gas venting since 2000.

"This equates to a six-megatonne reduction in greenhouse gases from 2000-05," he says.

The Alberta Energy and Utilities Board (EUB) reports a 32 per cent decline in sulphur emissions since 2000, thanks to a decline in gas processed and to

improved plant performance and modifications. The total number of pipeline ruptures and leaks per 1,000 kilometres of pipeline has also declined by 52 per cent since 1999.

Page cites Calgary-based Enbridge as an environmental standout. The pipeline company has branched out into wind power and fuel cells in recent years to find greener, more stable sources of electricity.

The company is involved in four wind power projects — two of which are in southern Alberta — which generate 270 megawatts of electricity.

Another working showpiece of the company's environmental commitment is set for

construction this year: a stationary fuel cell, being assembled on the parking lot of Enbridge's Toronto offices. The cell will use hydrogen from natural gas to generate 2.2 megawatts of electricity — enough to power about 1,300 homes.

"Fuel cells are cleaner, more efficient and more reliable. The intrinsic benefits of this are so compelling that I can't help but think that it's going to dominate while I'm still alive," says Charles Szmurlo, Enbridge's vice-president of energy technology and power generation.

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We were surprised to see this bottle here too.

Albertans are good at recycling. In fact, seven out of ten beverage containers are being recycled. With your help, ABCRC wants the other three. Whether it's remembering to recycle all your beverage containers, returning them to the bottle depot or donating your containers to charity through our Community Champions Program, every container makes a difference. For more information visit abcrc.com



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