

2008 -- A Year for Living Lightly

By David Chernushenko

As we enter 2008, we are again being bombarded by stark and sometimes apocalyptic warnings about climate change, ecological degradation, human suffering and social upheaval. While these stories are, unfortunately, far too true, they are also, fortunately, only one side of the story. What is too often missing from the news, the images and the information we receive, is the inspiring, hopeful and equally true stories of positive change.

The world, like our community, is full of people who are making a difference and leading by example. We are, literally, surrounded by such "local heroes." Ordinary folk, doing extraordinary things to solve social and environmental problems. Their motivation tends not to be wealth or fame; rather, they do what they do because it is satisfying, uplifting and rewarding in the truest and fullest sense of the word.

Wouldn't it be nice to hear more about these people, and to learn more about what they do, and why? Don't you think we could be building better, healthier, more supportive communities if we were to use our local heroes as role models, and share

a quest. It is a social movement with a very individual approach, and as such can be very public and communal, or very private and personal.

Living lightly is a lifestyle that is at the same time ethical, practical, economical and spiritual. It is a choice to better align the pursuit of our practical needs with our personal values and spiritual calling, and with the needs of our environment and of all humans and other forms of life.

Living lightly is not about guilt, sacrifice or preaching to others. It is about choosing to embrace a way of life that is exciting, challenging, rewarding, humbling, and as full of mistakes and dilemmas as it is full of achievements and certainty.

By living lightly, we choose to be active participants in finding and sharing solutions to today and tomorrow's environmental, social and economic challenges, without being judgmental or sanctimonious. By living lightly, we choose to adopt a positive, generous approach to seeking solutions and to sharing them with others, and to do so with humility.

Living lightly embraces the fact that we have a moral and practical obligation to reduce our personal impact on the planet, to consume fewer resources, to generate less waste and to



Living Lightly in Old Ottawa South: drying laundry with zero emissions, and that real fresh air smell, not the artificial one.

Photo by David Chernushenko

Living Lightly Project (LLP) with the help of some creative friends and generous supporters. In September we began working on the first Living Lightly film, and in November we launched the website (livinglightly.ca) that will be the hub for a local and global community, to view and share solutions and stories of living lightly, in the form of videos, photos, art and written material.

After 20 years of working to promote a more "sustainable" approach to community and economic development, in the public service, private sector and through politics, I have grown weary of the acrimony, the negative imagery and overhyped rhetoric on every side of the table. I am convinced there is a better, more positive way to tackle ecological problems and improve people's lives. It is based on finding common ground and pursuing mutually beneficial solutions. It involves dialogue, compassion and sharing.

My own efforts to lessen my "footprint", and that of my family, have been equal parts challenging, rewarding and humbling; sometimes even funny. I find that sustainable living is not only personally fulfilling, it brings me into regular contact with

inspiring people. We share a vision of a better way of living, and are determined to prove what is possible, rather than give up our dream in the face of challenges. I have found that when you bring practical optimists together, they can accomplish even more, and inspire others.

The LLP aims to inspire a global community of citizens to take practical action to build sustainable communities and livelihoods. We do that by interviewing and then showcasing on video people who are already on the road to "living lightly", telling their stories and sharing their knowledge and passion. The videos show that viable and exciting alternatives exist to typical current practices (of individuals, groups and companies), and aim to inspire people to adopt some of these or create their own versions.

We are producing and presenting visual media (video, photos and illustrations) using all available tools: our "hub" website, television, multimedia live presentations, podcasts and DVDs. Our team is small, our means are modest, our confidence large, our goals huge and our enthusiasm unlimited.



Living Lightly in Old Ottawa South: Keeping your cool, naturally. Shade trees, vines and naturalized gardens. Photo by David Chernushenko

their solutions more widely? I think we could, and that's why I launched the Living Lightly Project.

More about the Project follows, but first, what is "living lightly", and why am I so passionate about promoting it as a helpful and holistic philosophy; an approach to living?

Understanding "Living Lightly"

Living lightly means seeking a personally fulfilling and enriching way of life that makes a positive impact on our environment, our community and society, and inspires others to want to join us.

There is no single definition of living lightly, nor is there a roadmap or a set of commandments that will apply to every person in every society. It is a pursuit, a philosophy or maybe even

achieve a better balance between our needs and those of the natural world. But more than that, Living Lightly is a proclamation that we can actually achieve a better quality of life in the process.

Living lightly is a way to attain richer, more meaningful lives. It's a means to build stronger and healthier communities and economies. It's a way to improve security and boost resilience.

We can achieve these goals by more equitably sharing the abundance of Earth's natural resources as well as the fruits of human ingenuity and imagination. And we can smile and laugh while we are at it!

The Living Lightly Project

In early 2007, I launched the



Living Lightly in Old Ottawa South: If you don't like watering, spraying pesticides and cutting grass, maybe there's a natural alternative. Time to plant thyme! Photo by David Chernushenko

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An "Open Source-Inspired" Community

The project is unique not just in its philosophy, but also in its format. The project is about sharing a vision through words as well as visual means. Contributions are made using an interactive online forum. The LLP team will contribute some content, but much will be submitted by the global community. That is where I believe the real strength of the project rests: the fact that ultimately nobody will own the project; or perhaps, everybody will own the project. It will become a true projet de société.

Living lightly is an "open source-inspired" project. My team is contributing to the development of an operating system (solutions) to ensure that all of human society has the tools and the knowledge to live lightly and sustainably. Nobody has all the answers. Nobody has all the knowledge. Only collectively can we find the answers, test the solutions and solve the biggest challenges faced by humanity; one step at a time.

The "100 kilometre Film" and it's Old Ottawa South Links

The first Living Lightly Project video is a "point of view" documentary that explores a set of questions: What is living lightly? What does it look like? Who is doing it? Why? Are they

nuts? What do they get out of it? Can all of us give it a try? Does it hurt? Is it enough? How do I join?

The film takes us on a tour of greater Ottawa. From Seneca Street to Wakefield, to the Arbour Environmental Shoppe, to the GTC and the Currents building, home to Hopewell and Riverdale, and back out to North Gower.

While we could have, travelled the world chasing interesting stories, we rapidly concluded that this would be both unnecessary and hypocritical. Instead we settled on making a "100-kilometre film" – an approach that fit our budget, was consistent with our environmental commitment, and nicely illustrated our main point: you do not have to look far to find inspiring people and interesting stories. Every community is full of local heroes, living lightly and modestly.

Our beloved Old Ottawa South, it's landmarks and people will feature prominently in the first film. We will meet OOS residents Randi Cherry and Robert D'Aoust, the Otesha Project's "hopeful high school hooligans" on Riverdale, former OOS gardener Fran Doy and some residents of Terra Firma just over the border in Old Ottawa East. We'll see local porch sales, rainbarrels, composters, clotheslines, solar panels and Smart cars. Watch for yours!

A Chance to Participate



Living Lightly in Old Ottawa South: If you don't like watering, spraying pesticides and cutting grass, maybe there's a natural alternative. Time to plant thyme! Photo by David Chernushenko



Solar panels over my doorstep, more insulation in my walls. Small steps lead to big savings and quality of life improvements. Photo by David Chernushenko

You may have spotted our film crew roaming your street already, but wondered why you haven't been asked to participate, yet. Well, now you have.

Tell your story: We want you to tell us your tales of living lightly, however modest and small, or big! Get a camera from a friend, go to the website for instructions, contact me for help.

Critique our stories: Many of our films will be "built" online, as we make "chapters" available for feedback, and aim to incorporate suggested improvements. Sign up to take part in our focus group sessions in early February.

Share your solutions: Not into video? Prefer to write, photograph or draw? You can share your solutions and initiatives by contributing them to the website.

Lend a hand-- volunteer, publicise: We can always use people with skills to help the Project. Webmastery? Sound editing skills or studio space? How about sending your friends to the website?

Donate: Ah yes, money! Let's just say financial support is most welcome.

Come to the film opening/ Help organize it: No right-minded film producer can be certain of a completion date, but we are aiming to hold the big "Ottawa Premiere" in late May or early June. We'll need help to plan and execute it.

Join the growing Living Lightly movement

At this time of New Year's resolutions, the most important step you can take is to make 2008 your year of living lightly. Better yet, make 2008, the year you adopt living lightly as a lifetime goal, a guiding light, a reference for living a full and rewarding life. Start with one step. Then taken another. You won't be alone!

David Chernushenko is a professional speaker (www.davidc.ca), a member of the National Roundtable on the Environment and Economy, and creator/producer of the Living Lightly Project (www.livinglightly.ca)

