

Earth Day alive

Panel focuses on environmental action

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Keep Earth Day alive.
That was the focus at the 20th anniversary meeting of the East Michigan Environmental Action Council last week at the Cranbrook Institute of Science.

About 300 people attended the commemoration which included a reception followed by a business meeting and a panel discussion. EMEAC is "one of the most influential environmental organizations in the state," according to State Rep. Judith Miller, R-Birmingham, who presented a House resolution commemorating the group's anniversary.

EMEAC, founded in 1970, the same year as the first Earth Day celebration — celebrated both anniversaries with a panel discussion on environmental issues.

"We want to keep the Earth Day spirit alive," explained EMEAC president Alice Tomboulian.

The panelists were Raj M. Wiener, director of the Michigan Department of Public Health; Jonathan Buckley, professor of natural resources at the University of Michigan; and Paul Tomboulian, a member of the EMEAC Board of Directors who is also a professor of chemistry at Oakland University.

"We want to keep the Earth Day spirit alive."

— Alice Tomboulian,
President of EMEAC

WIENER OPENED the discussion with a reminder of the link between public health and concern for the environment.

"When we voice concern about the environment, we are voicing concern that human beings as a species will survive," she said. Society must never lose sight of the common link between the two.

When environmentalists, like EMEAC, voice concern about clean air and unpolluted water it is because humans must breathe that air and drink that water, she said.

"The earth will survive if the air is fouled and the water polluted," Wiener said. "But humans won't."

Society has made "visible progress" in some areas of protecting the environment, Wiener said. But environmental groups — as well as public health officials — should focus more on prevention. "For one thing, it's cheaper as well as more effective," she said.

"It's better to teach people healthy choices (for their lifestyles as well as the environment), than to correct

mistakes or bad habits."

That approach is paying dividends, Wiener insisted. "Ten years ago, who would have thought non-smoking would be the norm? A decade ago, who would have believed we'd be wearing seatbelts like we are?"

BUCKLEY, WHO is part of the court-ordered cleanup of the Rouge River system, said he is encouraged by the number of decisions being made — and problems being approached — as a regional concern.

There's a growing awareness that environmental problems are region-wide and thus require cooperation from different communities and, at times, different states, Buckley said. This regional approach was "unheard of" two decades ago, he continued, and the emergence of this cooperative attitude is an indication of a mature concern for the environment.

Tomboulian gave some common sense tips on translating a concern for the environment into everyday

actions. They included:

• Become environmentally aware. Learn about ecology and the environment from different sources to get a balanced view.

• Work on the environment in your immediate area. "Stay at home when you want to clean up the environment," he said. It's better to clean up a nearby river or protect a local wetland than to be overly concerned about an issue in a distant state or region.

• "Think global and act local," Tomboulian advised. Referring to an old Chinese proverb, he reminded the audience that the longest journey begins with a single step.

• Set an example by doing, not by saying. Each person should behave as if he or she is to be a role model for good environmental conduct.

• Don't preach about protecting the environment and don't try to make people feel guilty if they don't share the same environmental goals.

• While individuals are personally doing the right thing environmentally, they must not forget that the solution to every problem has a political connection.

"Environmental solutions are never simple," Tomboulian said. "And they are often unglamorous and inconvenient. But there's always a political link."

Grenade or dud?

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

Political warfare in Oakland County is heating up, with tax foe William D. McMaster throwing a verbal grenade — or is it a dud?

In a letter to the prosecutor, McMaster accused three well-known Republicans of criminal misconduct loosely connected with an attempt of the Oakland County Taxpayers Association to block the sale of \$600 million in bonds without first holding a vote of the people — and out commissioners who disagree.

The letter, dated Tuesday, accuses Jim Alexander, Republican county chairman, and Patrick Anderson, co-author of the Patterson-Anderson Citizens' Tax Limitation Amendment, with "unlawful interference with the American electoral process."

The same letter accuses County Executive Daniel T. Murphy and the Oakland County Board of Commissioners of not giving proper legal notice prior about meetings related to the solid waste program.

"I have called these (transgressions) to the attention of the prosecutor's office," McMaster said Wednesday. "Now it's up to him. We (McMaster and the taxpayers association) expect him to investigate" and, if appropriate, prosecute.

"I HAVE RESEARCHED the law," McMaster said. "And whether or not it's a misdemeanor or felony depends on how much money was involved... and that's up to the prosecutor."

Oakland County Prosecutor Richard Thompson was unavailable for comment Wednesday.

People accused by name in the letter, however, reacted with amazement, shock or dismay.

"This is ridiculous," said Alexander, a Birmingham lawyer. "His (McMaster's) facts are wrong and his conclusions are wrong. In my 17 years of practicing law I've never heard of such a thing."

Anderson, an executive with the Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Co., said, "These wild and ranting accusations are obviously false... and ludicrous."

McMaster said Alexander and Anderson "repeatedly phoned and otherwise badgered, intimidated and coerced several Republican candidates" recruited by the taxpayers association to run against incumbents who did not agree with its contention that a vote is required before the county sells the \$600 million worth of bonds.

"MESSRS. ALEXANDER and Anderson personally, and through their agents, engaged in a harassment campaign to pressure legitimate candidates into withdrawing" from the race.

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