

From North Hastings to New York



By Nate Smelle

For environmental activist and Hastings Highlands resident Jennifer Warr the debate whether humans are the driving force behind the accelerated climate change being documented around the planet was over long time ago. Feeling a the urge to take action on climate change beyond the local level, Warr and her husband Knowlton Hunter joined a bus full of student activists from Queens University to head down to the Peoples' Climate March in New York City.

?You do as much as you can locally all the time, but it just felt like this was going to be a big one,? Warr said.

?We wanted to be part of something monumental that the world just might notice.?

The couple has been deeply concerned about the state of the planet since they moved to Hastings Highlands as part of the back to the land movement in the 1970s. Now grandparents the couple feels it is their responsibility to leave the world a better place for future generations.

One of the most incredible things about the march was how it was organized into groups,? she said. ?When we were walking we would see health care workers marching because climate change is a health care issue; we would see groups of artists, puppeteers, scientists, Indigenous Nations. It was amazing to see how climate change has touched all of these people. I still get goosebumps talking about it.?

When the march finished its tour of the big apple on Sunday is when the real work begins, she explained.

?There was something amazing with having such a huge group of people all sharing one voice, saying, we need to do something. Hopefully everybody who was here goes home and continues their work to bring about the change we need.?

The very next day the heart of the financial district in lower Manhattan skipped a beat when thousands of environmental and anti-poverty activists staged a mass sit-in on Wall Street on Sept. 22. Organizers of the Flood Wall Street initiative stated that the intention of the public gathering was to actively inspire corporations, governments and individual people to take meaningful action on a web of issues such as poverty, social inequality and climate change.

Eager to build on the momentum created by the 400,000 plus individuals who peacefully took over the streets of New York City for the Peoples' Climate March a day earlier, demonstrators started assembling early for the protest in Battery Park. Most of the marchers dressed in blue to emphasize the aesthetic of a blue wave washing over Wall Street; sweeping corporate greed out to sea.

As two drops adding to the volume of this tsunami of change student activists Victoria Herring and Christopher Kelleher each participated in both marches. What really matters, they said, is where we go from here.

‘People come to small protests and then weeks go by and they completely forget about it, and nothing ends up changing,’ said Herring.

‘The main source of the problem all around the world is America, the main source of the problem in America is New York, and the main problem source in New York is Wall Street. It's not so much what we do personally. Here it's about what we do as a people. It's about what are we going to do when we go back to our communities.’

To be an activist requires a great deal of due diligence.

‘Be aware of things, study things,’ Herring said.

‘You have to go and read; you have to go and look up things. It's not just about what you see on FOX News.’

A good place to start with this investigation into our own consumption patterns is the ingredients in the food we eat, Kelleher added.

‘Whatever you buy read the ingredients. If you don't know what it is look it up. From there it will take you to a whole world of information, and you can find out where stuff is coming from, why it is coming from there and what's behind it. It's all built on food; we all eat food.’

Like Herring, Kelleher believes that actions speak louder than words. Now is the time for action, he said.

‘We have a voice and we don't use it, and it is time to use it,’ said Kelleher. ‘We outnumber these people who are holding us down and we are allowing them to. It's our choice; it's our decision when we vote with our dollars. Basically we are trying to instigate pro-activity and start doing something. We can still use money, because money is not bad. We can start spending it wisely, solar panels and wind energy rather than coal. We can have an economy based off of that; it's not that ludicrous.’

Kelleher considers gatherings like these as small but necessary steps that help expand public awareness on important issues. It is from this enriched sense of awareness that progressive changes arise, he explained. Still, such change does not come easy with so many manufactured obstacles in the way.

‘There is a huge disconnect from everything,’ he said.

‘There is a disconnect from the political system. We are in this rat race and we are fed up with it, but we don't hop off. We keep chasing the carrot rather than growing it.’