

Real World Food Heroes recognized in North Hastings



By Nate Smelle

Is there anything more important than food when it comes to sustaining one's health and well-being? Some might point to the fact that the human body can live longer without food than it can without water?which is true?however, take away just one of these components in this life-giving equation for more than 24 hours and the body will begin to tremble and shake as its energy reserves begin to deplete rapidly.

For the third year in a row, community members gathered to celebrate and honour the women, men and children who dedicate their lives to growing and supplying the people of North Hastings with this vital nourishment. On Saturday, Nov. 1, a crowd of farmers, gardeners and foodies came out to show their support for one another, and to raise awareness of the important role that small-scale food growers and producers play in creating a healthy and secure local food system.

The Real World Food Prize was first handed out in North Hastings in 2013 by local permaculturist and Real Food Hero in her own right, Laurie Ann Storning. The award was created by world-renowned food activist Dr. Vandana Shiva, and is intended to recognize individuals and/or organizations for their outstanding work towards facilitating community integration, education and celebration around the production of grassroots urban food production, guerrilla gardening and permaculture projects.

With more than 70 per cent of the world's food coming from small farms and gardens, Storning believes it is crucial that we recognize the Real Food Heroes building the local foundation of a healthy and secure food system. Storning believes that a food system without corporate control, GMOs, toxic chemicals and patented seeds is a food system that honours the soil, water air and earth that gives every living thing its life-sustaining energy.

Storning has been instrumental in building the sustainable food movement here in North Hastings and beyond, according to two of this year's winners, Ramona Tremblay and Jim Thomson. The husband and wife team have owned the Craftsman restaurant near Bancroft for more than 28 years. The Craftsman's motto speaks for itself 'Real Food for Real People. In that time they have strived to make the food they sell more sustainable every year.

'I am very careful what food I bring into my kitchen and how it is prepared,' said Thomson.

'I am very careful to stay informed and only bring sustainable products into my kitchen, and will remove any product from the menu that I feel no longer meets our sustainability standards.'

For example, they used to offer Sole and Cod on their menu, but removed both items because they were designated as in decline and therefore no longer sustainable.

'We now offer Wild caught Pickerel, Perch and Haddock on our menu,' he said.

'These fish are sustainable, at least for now. I stay informed on the companies I buy my products from. I will not knowingly deal with a company that does not meet our standards.'

A student in Storning's series of permaculture workshops held in and around Bancroft over the years, Tremblay is extremely grateful for the knowledge and the skills passed on to her by Storning.

'I think about my grandchildren, I think about what real food will be available for them in the future,' said Tremblay.

'I think about nature, our relationship with nature, the environment, sustainability, responsibility. I think about the knowledge my

grandparents and parents passed on to me about food and gardening. I want to pass this on to my grandchildren, but sadly, I have forgotten much of what they taught me, because like many, for a number of years, I was too busy to have a garden and grow my own food. What was second nature to my grandmother and my mother about growing food, storing and preserving what you grow, I struggle to remember and put back into practice. I wish I had paid more attention. I wish I had not stopped growing food for so many years.â

Now that there seems to be more of a movement towards going back to some of the more sustainable and smaller gardens, Tremblay and Thomson consider themselves very fortunate for all of the local organic farmers and growers in the area who they purchase from at the local farmers' markets. Sometimes Tremblay said they will even bring the produce into the restaurant if they have an abundance of certain vegetables like beans, squash, potatoes and more.

Still, she believes more can be done to increase the sustainability of their restaurant and the food they serve.

âI wish we could do more,â she said.

âI never feel like we are doing enough, but we try hard to use produce from the area. We have been fortunate over the years that we have had local people with an abundance in their gardens that we can purchase their produce for the restaurant.â

Tremblay says that everyone can do better when it comes to our food consumption patterns. She recommends reading and researching the ingredients composing the food we eat; knowing where our food comes from, and in turn respecting the ecosystem services that deliver it us from the soil to the plate.

âWe are losing our farmers, and we are losing all kinds of farmland,â said Tremblay.

âI am from an area near Bradford and all of the farms I worked on growing up are now gone. It's really sad. The more I learn about our food industry, the more concerned, the more worried and the more ill I feel about it. Pollinators are very important to us, and we do what we can to encourage them in our garden behind the restaurant.â

Rather than spraying pesticides that add carcinogens to the food and deplete the soil Tremblay says, she does all she can to encourage the beneficial butterflies, birds, bats and bees that help make the harvest more abundant.

âComposting is very important as well,â she said.

âWe need to take care of the soil. I thought I knew what I was doing with this until I took Laurie Ann's workshop on composting. It has made a huge difference.â

Keep an eye out in upcoming weeks for a series on the other local winners of this year's Real Food Prize in North Hastings. Other winners include: Lin Timbers, for her work in raising awareness of wild edible mushrooms; and the Hanes Family, owners' of York River Meats in Bancroft.