

Ithaca Journal

October 19, 2009

Activists have climate change's number

Environmentalists gather in Ithaca



By Stacey Shackford
sshackford@gannett.com

It's the number of miles to Boston and the date of the Barbarian invasion of Rome: 350. Environmentalists now want to make it synonymous with climate change, and dozens of them gathered in downtown Ithaca on Sunday to form a human representation of the number.

According to world climate experts, 350 parts per million is the maximum concentration of carbon dioxide that the global atmosphere can sustain without triggering dangerous climate disturbances.

It has been established as a benchmark figure and likened to the earth's normal body temperature, in which case the planet is currently running a fever, as its concentration of CO₂ is 387 ppm.

Activists are pushing for world leaders to do all they can to tend to the ailing planet, focusing their attention on raising awareness and political pressure in the run-up to a major United Nations climate summit in Copenhagen in December.

More than 3,000 events are being organized worldwide this week, including several in Ithaca. On Friday, 350 students in ghost costumes, or "climate Caspers," are expected to roam the Ithaca College campus, and Saturday will be a worldwide day of action. Sunday's gathering on The Commons included music, guest speakers and a large-scale aerial photo in which more than 100 people formed the number 350. Timed to coincide with the end of the Fingerlakes Bioneers Conference, the event attracted local activists, high school students and curious passers-by.

Ithaca resident Susan Allen-Gil got on her hands and knees to scrawl "Keep Ithaca and the planet cool" on a red banner.

She said she came with her daughter, Leslie, to show support for the worldwide and local movement.

Lyn Tryhorn spoke about her job as a climate scientist and how frustrating it is to constantly confront climate conspiracy theorists.

"It's not a question of faith, it's about physics," she said. "We need the world's nations to come together much in the way that people are coming together today."

Dominic Frongillo, deputy supervisor of the Town of Caroline, who will be leading the U.S. Youth Delegation to the international climate talks in December, said 350 is the most important number in human history, and represents an opportunity to profoundly change the way everyone relates to each other and the planet.

"This is not just about saving the polar bears, it's about saving ourselves," he said. For more information about the campaign and to see other photographs taken worldwide, visit www.350.org.