

Shifting into green

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This past weekend, approximately 30 Geneseo students traveled to the University at Buffalo to partake in New York State's first regional Power Shift summit.

Esther Dsouza, conference director and a senior at UB, said that the inspiration to hold a regional conference came from the national convention, which Geneseo students attended in Washington, D.C. last year. That convention was the largest gathering of climate and clean energy activists in United States' history. According to Dsouza, Power Shift NY sought to become a platform "for student leaders across the region to discuss issues of sustainability, activism, restoration and the future of our endangered environment's legacy."

The conference opened Friday afternoon with a rally in front of the headquarters of the U.S. Energy Development Corporation. Environmental activists have decried the corporation's proposal to install test wells in Allegany State Park with the intent of eventually erecting a full scale drilling operation. Protestors crowded the busy intersection chanting, "Keep public lands out of careless hands."



Media Credit: Submitted by Adam Kroopnick
From left: Sophomore Tamar Massen, sophomore Elizabeth Huss and junior Garrett Burger join in a protest at Power Shift NY at the University of Buffalo.

The second day of the conference consisted of a series of panels and workshop sessions. Topics for discussion included activism, green careers and lifestyles, education and ecology and campus sustainability. Geneseo junior Arielle Aronoff gave a presentation on permaculture and creative ecology; senior Jon Hoose, vice president of Geneseo Environmental Organization led a workshop on how to start a community garden on campus and senior GEO President Adam Kroopnick lent his insight to a panel titled Sustainability Across Our Campuses.

New York State Senator Antoine Thompson, chair of the Environmental Conservation Committee, accepted an invitation to speak at the conference about current environmental legislation being passed in Albany. One such bill is the Climate Change Pollution Act, which charges the state to achieve a carbon emission reduction of 80 percent by 2050.

Sunday, the final day of the conference, featured environmental activist Lois Gibbs, renowned for her exposure of the toxic waste dump in her former hometown of Love Canal, N.Y. in 1978. Gibbs has worked extensively to protect neighborhoods from being exposed to hazardous waste. Recently, she contributed to efforts to phase out the use of polyvinyl chloride in certain plastics. PVC produces dioxin, a carcinogen linked to birth defects, learning disabilities and reproductive health issues. Mike Schade, Gibbs' collaborator, will be on campus tomorrow at 12 p.m. to discuss the agent with the Geneseo community.

The conference came to a close with the energizing and inspirational words from Dominic Frongillo, the 26-year-old town councilor and deputy town supervisor for Caroline, N.Y. "The next few years will determine the quality of life for the next millennia," he said. "Doing unrealistic things is more possible than the realistic. The only way we can make the changes we need is to build the world of our dreams."

Thrilled with the success and positive feedback generated by the conference, students from UB, SUNY Fredonia, SUNY Alfred, Cornell University and Geneseo have already pledged to create a statewide conference in Albany for 2011. Kroopnick said he found symbolism in a highway sign: "In big, bold letters it stated, 'I-90 East to Albany.' We may not have known exactly where we were going, but now, with big, bold demands, and a big, bold definition of what our future will be, we know right where we're headed - straight to Albany."