

Volunteers deliver bulbs in Caroline

Group spreads message of energy efficiency

*By Aaron Munzer
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CAROLINE — Foot soldiers in the fight for an energy independent community talked up bright ideas about saving energy and handed out reusable cloth bags stuffed with an efficient compact fluorescent light bulb (CFL) to each of Caroline's 1,400 households Saturday.

Approximately 90 volunteers from Cornell University, Ithaca College and the surrounding communities walked, biked, drove and even rode horses around Caroline, distributing the bulbs with a friendly message: help make the town a model for other rural communities seeking to control their energy costs.

"We're trying to take energy independence into our own hands," said Dominic Frongillo, a council member in the Town of Caroline, deputy supervisor, and a member of Energy Independent Caroline, the group behind the distribution. "This is our future."

The project was funded by a \$5,000 grant written with money from the Cornell Community Partnership Board, the Cornell Cooperative Extension, and an anonymous local donor. The colorful cloth bags were made by Sew Green, an Ithaca-based sustainable sewing group.

Frongillo said he and the other residents are taking sustainability into their own hands because the federal government isn't.

"Things are going so slow to address climate change," Frongillo said. "I came back from the (United Nations) Climate Change Conference in Bali and realized it's up to us. We're the leaders we're looking for."

Collectively, Frongillo said the project could save residents \$70,000 in energy bills and reduce carbon emissions by more than 800,000 pounds over the bulbs' lifetimes. The town has already made strides to decrease its energy impact. In 2005 it became the second municipality in the state to purchase wind power for 100 percent of its electricity use.

The volunteers who handled the distribution Saturday set out with smiles as they went door-to-door to greet their neighbors, some who were tanning or working on a new front walk.

Megan O'Rourke, a Caroline resident and Cornell graduate student, said she remembered the neighborhood route from Halloween trick-or-treating, and enjoyed the chance to introduce herself to other residents

"I like to meet the neighbors, and share information about energy conservation with them," she said.

Another volunteer, Anne Stork, a lecturer of biology at Ithaca College, said she thought the project was more about energy efficiency education than free light bulbs.

"Today's really about awareness," she said.

Although some residents had already installed CFLs, like Edward Prouty of Buffalo Road, most received the free bulb with surprise and interest, especially when they found out the CFLs use only about 25 percent of the electricity that normal incandescent bulbs suck up.

Prouty, a 73-year-old who hasn't retired yet, said the spiral-shaped bulbs he's installed have saved him money, even though they initially cost more to buy.

"They last a lot longer, so how are they more expensive?" he said. "I tell everyone. The only thing wrong with these things is we get infested with lady bugs, and these catch a lot of them."

For some volunteers, the day was also a chance to show how to conserve energy in other ways. Her saddlebags filled with light bulbs, Caroline resident JoAnne Guarino and her daughter Cassie rode their two Palo Fino horses from house to house in an unusual statement about alternative transportation.

"Horses are energy efficient, they don't use gas, and I think people need to start thinking about different ways to save energy and different modes of transportation, whether it's taking your horse, your bike, or walking," she said. Her steed whinnied appreciatively.

Ithaca College student Serena Weckel said she volunteered because she wants to change the notion that rural communities are backward.

"Sometimes I feel like they get left out," she said. "They're employing their own sustainable ways, and people just don't know it."