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Greenrock: A voice for many issues regarding our island



BEHIND all the politicking over affordable housing, behind all the arguments as to where the hospital should or should not be placed, lies the important issue of sustainable development.

In 2003, a local charity, Greenrock, was created with just that in mind. Its aim is to encourage societal and environmental harmony, thereby making Bermuda socially, economically and environmentally sustainable for future generations.

This week, Mid-Ocean News reporter HEATHER WOOD and photographer CHRIS BURVILLE spoke with Greenrock founder Erin Moran.

Q: What led to your interest in the environment? Was it something instilled in you as a child?

A: I was always outdoorsy and, growing up in Bermuda, I could be climbing trees and riding bikes all year. Both my parents had a true appreciation for the outdoors so we did a lot of camping, boating, fishing etc.

My real interest began when I was doing my master's in Nutrition and Oriental Medicine in Seattle. I began to see the inter-relatedness of human health and the environment. Following school when I moved back, I was acutely aware that Bermuda was behind in many ways environmentally – poor recycling programme, terrible emissions spewing from vehicles, throw-away society, etc. – and consequently (had) a lot of illness.

Q: What is Greenrock?

A: Greenrock is a registered Bermuda charity, a non-profit organisation working to encourage social and environmental harmony in Bermuda through education and entertainment. We have shifted our focus in the past year to address not just environmental issues but all issues relating to sustainable development.

Greenrock is now growing as a communication platform for those concerned about Bermuda, not political parties. Greenrock is politically neutral. We are working to be a grass-roots, action-based organisation – to see that sustainable development happens and give simple and reasonable tips about what individuals can do (and) also to bring our community together through music and other community projects.

I never wanted Greenrock to be a solely environmental organisation. It started out that way because we were only a few people. People label environmentalists immediately – hippie, tree hugger – but I think in this day and age, everyone needs to be thinking at least a little about their environment. The key is seeing the connection between social,

economic and environmental – the tenets of sustainable development.

Q: What are its aims?

A: A communication platform through site events and projects, to continue to bring the community together in fun ways (and to) mobilise action against issues impacting the success of the Sustainable Development Plan.

Q: What does the organisation think about the fact that Government has established a sustainable development plan?

A: Great work has been done to collect all the information and seek public consultation, but like many, we are sceptical that Government is jumping on the sustainable development "bandwagon" and is not really intending to *truly* follow through with the initiatives.

That's why we felt it imperative for a non-political entity to watch the process closely and ensure that issues raised are understood and implemented. Bermuda is in a very pregnant time, pregnant with the possibility of becoming either an idyllic or a horrific place to live. (The Sustainable Development Plan) is too important for it to be used for political gain – this applies to both parties.

Q: Any idea on how various aspects of it might be made more appealing to the broader public?

A: Firstly, Government must show by example that they understand sustainable development and they are living by the goals they have set for the island. Without that, sustainable development will not be respected or implemented. Social programmes for our youth must start up again, affordable housing must be affordable and include thought of transport to and from larger housing developments, building codes must (be implemented) with sustainable development in mind.

Then simple things need to be incorporated into everyday life. Changing a few light-bulbs, recycling, taking public transport, walking to the store – all ways to change our mindset, save us a few dollars and help us to live together on this rock a little easier. A great incentive programme would be the Bottle Bill – a deposit system for glass bottles (which leads to) less trash and (could be a) financial incentive for everyone. Other incentives would be great to see – carpooling incentives and less expensive public transport.

Q: Considering the degrees of wealth and education on this island, do you find it odd that Bermuda had not embraced certain aspects of sustainable development sooner?

A: No. Unfortunately, wealth seems to have always taken priority although I know that the concepts have been thrown around for several years. I think we, as a culture, have been wrapped up in how we're doing "economically" and that has taken precedence. This has been the priority for so many years that many things have been left behind – our cultural identity, our community, our families.

We don't have time because we're trying to pay rent or pay a mortgage. We are at a tipping point – expats are getting threatening notes left on their cars, the youth are trying to get our attention, our environment is showing signs of serious imbalance.

These things have happened gradually (although in my eyes everything is speeding up) so we may not have noticed and this is why sustainable development was always on the back burner. There was always something more important . . . usually money-making.

Q: In your dream world, how would Bermuda move forward with regard to energy use, conservation, etc.?

A: So many things could be done. We could only allow energy-efficient appliances to be

imported. We could start really using wind and solar power and setting it up so we can feed the energy produced back into Belco's grid.

(I'd like to) see more electric bikes and cars, hybrids so we can dramatically decrease our dependence on oil. (I'd like us to) use Bio-diesel as much as possible when it is available, next year I think. My next bike will be electric and I hope to solar power it. We should never have imported the Honda CRV. (It's) a ridiculous gas-guzzling, status symbol car for this island that most people can't even handle to drive on Harbour Road. We must think locally but also globally. Oil is a precious commodity, we should be working to decrease our reliance on it, not increase it.

Q: Do you think the public is aware of Greenrock and its aims?

A: No, and we are working on this. Our AGM last week was sort of our coming out event. At this stage we are working on building our membership and a larger management committee. The more people who are motivated to see Bermuda go the route of being an idyllic place, and not a horrific one, the more we as an organisation can do. Greenrock will be a voice for so many issues regarding our island – not just environmental ones – we just need people. You will start to hear more in the coming months.

Q: Why was Greenrock formed?

A: In 2003, with Iraq, oil, climate change, etc., it seemed clear that we needed to see a mindset shift to simple and sustainable living globally, but particularly in Bermuda. We also noticed tensions worsening racially, and Bermudian versus non-Bermudian. The focus of Greenrock was to bring the community together through our events and projects as a way to exemplify rather than rant about a few ways to change the mindset. So our goal was always two-fold – social and environmental harmony.

Q: Tell me about the entertainment part of the organisation?

A: What better way to bring the island together than music? We want to bring in unique artists that cross the racial, socio-economic divide. Our idea is that if we can get people to the event, they will learn just by being there.

We "Greenrock" our events and projects by always promoting minimal waste; we have clearly marked recycling bins, flavoured waters with reusable cups to cut down on plastic water bottles, cigarette butt disposal etc. The challenge with the entertainment side of Greenrock is of course financial.

Q: Do you try to implement Greenrock practices in your own life? If so, how?

A: Yes and I find it challenging too. But I started with a few simple and inexpensive things – changing a few light-bulbs to compact fluorescents, taking the bus to work as often as I can (the bus is great), walking to the store, buying local produce, using canvas reusable grocery bags, recycling, NOT buying a Honda CRV, looking into electric bikes, keep informed about issues plaguing our society and hearing all sides, and looking at things through the lens of sustainable development – the social, economic and environment aspects.

The ripple effect of Greenrock is that individual choice does have an effect. For example, when I moved in last year, I was the only one on my street to recycle. Now there are five recycling bags at the end of the road every week.

Q: Is Greenrock affiliated with any other organisation?

A: No we are not. It's not an offshoot of anything. Many people, when we first started in 2003, were kind of confused – are you part of Greenpeace? Is this an overseas organisation? We just kind of came up with the idea of Greenrock.

We were mainly an environmental organisation to start with, now we're branching off to all issues of sustainable development because it's so important to go that route right now. The 'rock' ties in with the music side of it and also pertains to our idea of the ripple effect. When you throw a pebble into the water you have this ripple that happens and our idea is that individual choice actually does make a big difference. That's kind of the three-pronged reason why we chose the name Greenrock.

Q: How did you set your principles, your aims?

A: That's definitely developed over time. It was actually Chanelle Vaughn and myself who came up with the concept for Greenrock and how we first came about. She actually left the island but we got other people who we thought might be interested and then we formed this little group.

Some people have left, some people have joined, and now we're really trying to build it because the more people we can get involved, the larger we can grow – and that's just the bottom line of volunteerism anyway.

If we get a managing board of 12 people and our executive is six, then we can really get some work done. We have a lot of people who are interested in volunteering, but we really need people who are going to be pro-active about it.

Q: You earlier mentioned renewable energy. How could that work here?

A: Renewable energy is definitely a focus of ours. World-wide, we need to decrease our dependency on oil. You can use wind power, solar power. This is all stuff that I'm learning so I'm by no means an expert in it but we did have Tim Miller come and speak at our AGM.

He is actually converting his old Bermuda home – it's very old, probably over 100 years. He's going to be using a wind generator or two. He's using a grey water system, which is basically recycling the water that goes down the drain in the sink and bathtub and using it for toilets, and he's also doing solar water heating.

An actual solar panel will go on top of the roof, which actually has copper wire with water in it. It heats the water up and that's what you use for your hot water instead of a water heater that you plug in. Right now he's shooting for 50 per cent of his house to be off the grid, not attached to Belco at all.

He's really hoping – and we're hoping as well – that Belco starts to allow for extra energy that's produced by individuals to feed back to the grid. That's what's done in the States and many places in Europe. You get a saving if you have solar panels, if you have wind generators you pay very little to the electrical company – you're actually feeding back in. It's a recycle in itself.

Q: Is Tim one of a handful of people doing it here?

A: There's lots of people in Bermuda who are doing it but they tend to live on boats. People living on boats can do it pretty easily but to do it in an old Bermuda house is challenging. But Tim gave a great presentation at our AGM and people were really interested. There were quite a few people there who were already starting to think about it, ordering wind generators and so on.

Financially, it's a long shot, for example, for me to do that kind of thing to my house. It is one of our focuses but we really want to be giving people tips on the simple things that you can do. You asked if I implemented Greenrock practices in my own life, yes I do, but the most inexpensive things.

We want to be able to appeal to everybody. We want to get across to people that even though it's a really small thing you're doing, you're still contributing to the whole aspect of

sustainable development.

Q: Is your membership representative of Bermuda's population?

A: No. And that's what we're aiming for. That's the other side of Greenrock. I never wanted it to be just an environmental organisation. I always wanted it to encompass social and environmental and bring the two together and that was the whole idea of having music, the concerts, bringing in acts that we wouldn't normally bring in.

We have soca, we bring in reggae a lot – we bring in acts that would bring the community together and help them learn just by being there. We're very particular about how we "Greenrock" an event. We try and reuse everything – composting, recycling. But no, we don't have a representative makeup and that's really what we're trying to do.

So it's important for us to get our name out there amongst the youth. We want to do something in the schools, to get people started thinking. It's tough. There's a lot of people to try to convince and we also have to convince them that we're not a bunch of tree huggers. We're not just a bunch of hippies with that kind of attitude.

Q: How difficult do you think it would be to convince people to buy items most beneficial to the environment?

A: Greenrock is about changing the mindset. It's about simplifying things – quality over quantity. Trying to instil that is difficult, but buying locally is not that much more expensive if you're buying local produce. And it's better for you. A lot of people say I don't want to buy natural dishwashing liquid because it's too expensive.

In some ways I'm in agreement with that, so let's give you some options that are not as harmful to the environment that are cheaper. And that's the kind of stuff we want to get on our web site because it is difficult and things are expensive.

But really, the list of things I gave you about doing Greenrock practices, none of that is expensive – using canvas bags when you go to the grocery store is simple, buying local produce, looking into electric bikes as opposed to buying the latest gas-powered bike.

Q: Do you think we have a hope with regard to implementing a successful sustainable development plan?

A: I really think this is a very pregnant time right now and we're going to go one of two ways. We're either going to go towards creating an idyllic society or I think it could get pretty ugly. At this point right now, it is so important for people to stop and look around and say, 'Hey, what do we want?'

The threatening notes left on cars for expats, gang violence, shootings – all of those issues seem to be happening all of a sudden, but it's been a gradual change. Everything is impacting everything right now.

They say sustainable development doesn't mean no development, but I do think that we should really consider slowing down – and this is just a personal thing – the amount of businesses that are setting up in Bermuda, just from an infrastructure perspective.

When you're building a huge condo development, figure out the transportation issues of that development. You can't do one without the other.

As long as Government is looking through everything in terms of the sustainable development triangle – the social, economic, environmental – equally, we're going to be okay. It's been all economic for so long. That's taken priority. Everything else has been left behind.

Q: Do you have some sympathy for the Government in the sense that it's learning as well?

A: I do. But I think as long as they're open to really understanding sustainable

development – because we're all learning – then I think it has a chance. But we're sceptical which is why we changed our focus to being more of a platform for communication for sustainable development.

We want to help people really get an understanding – what do you mean? What can I do? – and also to be a bit of a watchdog. The Sustainable Development Roundtable can be shut down at any point. Government can decide it's done enough. If another party comes into power, it can decide it doesn't need it.

And then what happens? But if we have an organisation that's actually focused on looking at things through that lens then people can voice through us.

And if we have a large enough voice then we can make a real difference. And so that's definitely where we're headed, just being a non-political entity, grassroots, action-based.

For more information on Greenrock visit www.greenrock.org.
