



Resources for Cape Ann Bottom-Line Eco-Activism

Dan Greenbaum of Gloucester

Environmentalism and banking may not be two pursuits we normally associate. But a community environmental group on the north shore of Massachusetts is running, by its own admission, like a bank. "Each time we help the community on a noncontroversial project, we get a little credit," said Dan Greenbaum, director of Resources for Cape Ann (RCA), a project of the Massachusetts Audubon Society. "Each time we take a position on a controversial issue, we spend a little of that credit. The trick is to not go into the red."

In three years working in and around the fishing port of Gloucester, Greenbaum and his staff have shown that with planning, tact, and charisma, it's possible to win the respect and cooperation of local government and industry while catalyzing environmental change in a community.

RCA was made possible by a five-year grant from a Cape Ann resident who wished to see, in addition to direct local action, the building of a working model of an effective community environmental organization. Greenbaum, who holds a master's degree in city and regional planning from MIT, began in 1979 by focusing the project's efforts on two

specific areas: energy and coastal resources—the former a relatively safe topic and the latter potentially volatile. For the first two years, says Greenbaum, "We tried to show the community that environmentalists are not just people who oppose things, but positive as well."

After completing a study revealing that only 16 percent of Cape Ann homes were fully insulated and there were "tremendous savings to be made," RCA joined with a local housing group to renovate a ramshackle Victorian house in a project aptly named "House Warming." Tours, lectures, and hands-on demonstrations exposed local residents to the joys of saving energy.

Then, in another "credit-building" project, RCA—at the city's request—studied ways to protect beach dunes from erosion. The remedy was simple: a few lines of wire fence, signs, plantings of dune grass, and old Christmas trees positioned to catch sand. It was so simple, in fact, that it seemed curious no one had thought of it before.

"Small towns don't have the money or the expertise to do environmental management," explains Greenbaum. "Let's face it, it's not always a priority. So small

groups like us, who do have it as a priority, can come in and get it started. Then eventually you can work it into the normal process of running a city."

Its credit firmly established, RCA is now tackling a much stickier problem: the dumping of raw sewage, street runoff, fish processing plant waste, and industrial oils directly into Gloucester Harbor. "We're trying to convince plant managers to spend money to reduce the waste stream," says Greenbaum, "but it's hard to pinpoint the economic consequences to *them* of tourists going elsewhere because the harbor is dirty."

Nevertheless, RCA has led a successful fight for a new sewage treatment plant and continues to battle over what can be dumped into the harbor. In so doing, it is spending some of its hard-earned credit. But far from going bankrupt, Resources for Cape Ann seems certain to remain a healthy investment in the future.

—GALE WARNER

For a copy of "Resources for Cape Ann: Initiating and Sustaining a Community Environmental Program," contact: Dan Greenbaum, RCA, 159 Main St., Gloucester MA 01930. 