

Aurora teen helps spearhead Toronto environmental conference



By Brock Weir

Sometimes teens are reluctant to toss away the finer things in life, even if it means doing a good turn for Mother Nature.

This isn't a view held by an adult with a dim view of the up and coming generation, but an attitude occasionally encountered by Aurora High School student Sally Falk.

Sally, a Grade 12 student, is one of four teens from York Region spearheading the International Sustainability Conference, set for September 27 at the University of Toronto. The brainchild of Global Green Alliance, an international youth organization with its own roots in British Columbia, this is the second year for the Conference, but a first for the Toronto area.

The aim of the conference is a day of 'innovation and inspiration' to introduce the leaders of tomorrow to new ideas and concepts related to sustainability, sustainable design, green technology, and providing resources for fellow youth to lay the foundation for green teams in their own school communities.

'Right now, it is a consumer society and sometimes when you tell them, 'Hey, I don't want to buy a new phone every year, or I'm not buying clothes from big companies', they are a little scared to give up their consumerist ways as teenagers,' says Sally. 'One thing I really wanted is to further York Region's awareness of this organization, getting a lot more local schools signed up so we can broaden our outreach in this area, as well as in Ontario.'

The Global Green Alliance (GGA) is a youth-run non-profit group founded to connect environmental clubs and youth groups around the world with what they describe as 'resources and support required to create successful, sustainable change.'

'By assisting new groups with creating green teams and helping existing green teams become more effective, the GGA is committed to making schools more sustainable places.'

Sally was first introduced to the Alliance while attending a program at Laval University. Keeping connected with the group through social media, she eventually applied for a position on their group's Board of Directors with an aim of starting up an active Ontario chapter.

'I have always been a nature lover, ever since I was a kid,' she says. 'I thought it would be a great way to take initiative and help the environment. As vice-president, I help hold weekly Skype meetings with our other directors from all around York Region and I

also help coordinate the Conference. As a global organization, we actually have members in seven countries. Our main goal is to connect those members and goals [to] share new ideas, get the conversation going globally about what they can do in their schools and their daily lives to be more eco-friendly.?

From Sally's perspective, it is easy to make a small change that makes a big difference. One of the most popular initiatives at the moment are increased efforts to go off to school with litterless lunches and reduce classroom waste to the bare minimum.

?If you have questions, we are over 700 members and there are lots of people available to answer them,? says Sally of the benefits of the Alliance. ?We also have lots of resources and pamphlets for getting green teams started in your school and your community, how to contact local sponsors and local groups so they can help host workshops at your meetings and other ways to help host meetings that appeal to a wide variety of students.

?If you have a passion and this is something that interests you when you read about it, just go online and sign up because all it takes is a little spark for you to achieve big things.?

For more information on the September 27 conference, or for the Global Green Alliance, contact Sally Falk at sallyfalk@sympatico.ca.