IT'S NOT THAT EASY BEING GREEN

BY LISA HAZIRJIAN

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS:

FROM BICYCLING TO RECYCLING

With cars competing for spaces and trash bins overflowing, the campus can look like an ecological disaster. But a new consciousness may be taking hold.

From the outside it seemed like every other off-campus student house: a few undergraduates sitting out on the porch enjoying an unusually cool August evening, swapping summertime stories while their housemates moved boxes and hooked up stereo equipment in preparation for the coming year. Yet inside, things were unmistakably different.

Carrying their wares from the front door to their bedrooms, residents had to be careful not to trip over the insulation wrappers that cluttered the living room floor. Rather than throw away their empty cardboard boxes or relegate them to the recycling heap, they set them aside for future use. As one woman emerged from her bedroom with books about global warming and deforestation to add to the house library, others sat in the university-furnished living room and discussed semester-long plans and last-minute concerns. Some talked about what vegetables to grow in their new garden and how to organize bulk shopping, while others debated which route would provide the quickest, safest way to bike to a nine o'clock class on West.

Meanwhile, out on the porch of the Green House, the new off-campus residence with an ecological accent, residents talked about the state of the environment at Duke. "When I came to Duke, I was just getting interested in the environment," says Trinity junior Joey Jann, "and I was appalled by Duke life." Living in Trent dormitory during her first year, Jann saw aluminum cans and unused paper thrown into garbage bins and windows kept open in mid-January to combat the blasting heat of outdated radiators. The level of waste was astonishing, and to environmentally-committed students like Jann, so were most people's attitudes. "People just weren't thinking about the way they were living."

Jann's frustrations fueled her initial interest in learning more about ecological issues and inspired her to become involved with campus environmental groups. While taking a house course on the environment during the spring of 1989, Jann and Green Housemate Jessica Barnhill began to work with course instructor Lee Altenberg and others to establish an alternative to traditional campus housing. Based on the model of the cooperative living groups at Berkeley and Stanford, where Altenberg had been a stu-

Collision course: Is the wave of the future a return to the past?

PHOTOS BY LES TODD

dent, the Green House aimed for cooperative, ecologically-sustainable living.

At least from outward appearances, the greater Duke community could stand to learn from the Green House way of life. With so many cars crowding campus lots that the parking office hardly knows what to do with them, and so much food taken out of the Cambridge Inn on sunny days that trash from overflowing bins pollutes the main quad, Duke can seem like an environmental disaster.

While a glance across the quad quickly confirms Joey Jann's first-year dorm observations, a closer examination of what is happening around campus reveals that ecological awareness is taking root at Duke. Take, for example, Duke Recycles and the Material Support Department, where what began as a small student volunteer effort and a handful of concerned employees has grown into an institutionalized, organized commitment to reduce Duke's material consumption.

As recently as the late Eighties, coordinated recycling at Duke was left to a splinter group of volunteers from the Environmentally Concerned Organization of Students (ECOS). Despite its efforts to attend to the few aluminum recycling bins it had placed on campus, ECOS found that recycling needs could not be handled by undergraduate volunteers stomping on empty cans behind the East Campus Center. A group of students and staff joined forces in the fall of 1988 to develop a proposal for waste reduction at Duke, and by August of 1990 Duke Recycles was approved and funded.

With a full-time coordinator, a dozen part-time students, and occasional volunteers, Duke Recycles has taken the campus by storm. Recycling bins are nearly everywhere, from academic buildings to dining facilities to dormitories. And they are filled to the brim. In the last academic year, Duke Recycles collected nearly 400 tons of paper, aluminum, and glass, up from eighty-four tons the year before. And at Duke Medical Center, the environmental services staff recycled nearly 200 tons of paper.

Stephanie Finn, coordinator of Duke Recycles, says she's pleased with the organization's success but warns that while recycling is integral to waste reduction, the university committee needs to do more. "It's easy to recycle; it's hard to think about how not to use resources to begin with." And her co-workers in the purchasing division of Material Support, Finn reports, have been extremely devoted to that cause.

"Every time something comes up, I look to see if we can offer a recycled option,"

Duke Recycles collected nearly 400 tons of paper, aluminum, and glass, up from 84 tons the year before.

says Evelyn Hicks, the university's buyer responsible for all centralized janitorial and office supply purchasing. Often working in consultation with Duke Recycles, Hicks has introduced recycled products throughout the Duke inventory. "As the cost has come down, we find that more people are using it," she says. Many people were hesitant about switching to recycled paper, she says, until they saw that today's recycled products are virtually indistinguishable from virgin paper. Hicks' initiative is beginning to make its mark throughout Duke: The entire campus now uses recycled paper towels, Academic Computing re-inks its laser jet cartridges eight or nine times before disposing of them, and Reprographic Services is considering converting to all recycled copy paper.

Similar efforts are under way at university dining services, which has stopped purchasing Styrofoam cups, has switched to biodegradable paper products, and has begun to replace the paper napkins and tablecloths in the Oak Room and the Faculty Commons with cloth. Food Salvaging Program volunteers like Jessica Barnhill bring leftovers to the Durham Community Kitchen. Options for vegetarians are available in dining halls and through Plan V, the student cooperative vegetarian eating club.

Dining Services still uses disposable plates, cups, and utensils in many eating locations, despite a desire to cut back on them. "We see the incredible waste of paper cups and paper goods. Every single food service person would be delighted to go back to china, silverware, and glassware," says Dining Services' general manager Glenn Gossett. But every year his department incurs approximately $65,000 in losses related to broken, lost, and stolen permanent ware; a small fraction of this is recouped in May when the housekeeping staff returns two to three truckloads of dishes and utensils from dormitories and campus apartments. When Dining Services tried to comply with a Bryan Center guideline mandating use of permanent ware in the Rathskeller, they lost more than 300 espresso cups and 500 stainless steel forks in just one week. Thousands of plastic sandwich baskets wound up in the trash, presumably because students did not realize they were meant to be re-used.

Although he would prefer to phase out the use of disposables, Gossett knows that it is not economically feasible unless behavior changes first. "With current community attitudes, we cannot manage to provide permanent ware."

People's attitudes also lie at the heart of Duke's perpetual parking problems. In an attempt to keep up with constantly rising demand for more on-campus parking, the university built a new 228-space parking lot this summer at a cost of about $1,800 per space; in mid-September, the Medical Center broke ground for a 1,700-space parking garage, scheduled to be completed in late 1992 at a projected cost of $12 million.

In the heart of the campus, where more than 7,400 cars were registered last year, neither environmental nor financial concerns seem to dissuade people from using their cars. "Convenience is rated far more important than costs in our surveys," parking administration manager Chuck Landis says. Indeed, seventy-five drivers have placed their names on the waiting list for spaces in two premium lots on West Campus, where decals cost $225 annually. Parking is a break-even operation, Landis says, but attitudes are so strong that turning it into a for-profit venture probably wouldn't deter people from bringing their cars to campus.

"It's just hard in this area to get people to give up their cars," says Harry Gentry, manager of transportation, parking, and facilities at Duke Medical Center. "It's like their pacifier." Eight years ago his department bought four vans and hired a full-time ride-sharing coordinator in order to promote group commuting. It even created a special premium parking area specifically for car pools, but only one group used it. The van pools, Gentry says, were equally unsuccessful.

Part of the transportation problem is a lack of attractive options, according to Internal Audit director Richard Siemer, who has worked for the past five years as an adviser with both Duke's Bicycling Task Force and the Energy Conservation Advisory Committee. "A switch to bicycling won't come until you put in the infrastructure," he says. "Some people will use bikes no matter

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what, but many will not until there is adequate parking, pathways, and security."

The students, faculty, staff, and administrators on the Bicycling Task Force have developed plans for just such an infrastructure: a designated bikeway connecting East and West campuses (with eventual extensions reaching to Science Drive and nearby Durham communities heavily populated by Duke employees and students) and adequate bicycle storage at each end of campus. The plan also calls for a bicycle registration program aimed at increasing awareness of bike regulations, decreasing bike theft, and measuring the level of bike use. Registration fees will be nominal, and registrants will receive waterproof cycle covers featuring the Duke logo.

"We are going to have a Duke bikeway," Siemer says. "There's no question about that. It's just a question of how." Questions about the placement of the pathway and funding for the project—estimated at $100,000 for a thousand new racks and just under $250,000 for the East-West path—remain unresolved, but $50,000 appropriated last summer is already being used to install the first batch of new bike racks.

Hot wheels: bicycling needs include parking, pathways, and security

As members of the Bicycling Task Force were cranking out their final proposal this fall, Siemer was working with the Energy Conservation Advisory Committee to examine broader questions about campus energy consumption. Launching a five-year energy audit of all Duke buildings, the committee wants to measure Duke's efficiency and determine how improvements can be made to increase energy conservation, as well as to decrease the university's annual $12-million power, $5.5-million steam, and $1.8-million water bills.

Despite his belief in institutionalized change, Siemer concedes that goals like energy conservation cannot be achieved through infrastructure alone. "It has to be a cultural change, a mindset. At the same time you're making infrastructure changes, you have to be making the change of attitude."

Siemer says that there should be a permanent place at Duke for something like the Energy Conservation Advisory Committee, and someone who acts as a sort of "Energy Czar." "We need someplace and someone to constantly churn out dialogue," Siemer says, "someone like Norm Christensen."

Christensen is a fitting spokesperson for the environment. He is the first dean of the School of the Environment; and the new school he oversees is a natural habitat for campus environmental activities. The School of the Environment has combined the former school of Forestry and Environmental Studies and the Duke Marine Lab. It has developed an interdisciplinary structure to draw upon the talents of not just natural scientists, but also social scientists, engineers, and what Christensen calls "clinicians"—the forest and environmental managers who do hands-on work outside the lab. "Environmental issues don't fall into tidy disciplines," says Christensen, and a comprehensive approach is often needed in order to address them.

But what kind of impact can the new school have upon campus attitudes? Duke's commitment to environmental education can make a profound difference, Christensen says. He recalls Earth Day 1970, the turning point that marked the last surge in campus environmentalism. "At that time, people associated environmental problems with certain political contexts. That there was a major problem, one of global proportions, wasn't something people thought about. They focused more on single issues. What the last twenty years demonstrates is that our worst fears are true. For instance, we now know that chlorofluorocarbons are harmful."

Greater scientific knowledge along with heightened media interest in environmental issues have contributed to the current consciousness. "It's not simply a political agenda being played out. The general level of concern is much better informed today. It's that fact that is likely to sustain awareness at the university and is likely to bring about a strong base of students and faculty to make changes in years to come."

Duke is particularly well-suited to fostering that growth. With an increase in undergraduate course offerings on environmental topics in fields ranging from geology to history, a new environmental policy internship track at the Institute for Policy Sciences and Public Affairs, research centers like the Center for Tropical Conservation and the Center for Resource and Environmental Policy Research, and the vast resources of the School of the Environment, an environmentally-aware observer like Trinity junior Rob Alexander says, "Academically, we're lucky."

Co-founder of the Green Earth Gang, an environmental-education program in Durham elementary schools, Alexander has worked with a host of student environmental groups to deepen campus awareness of ecological problems. He has participated in the annual Beach Sweep at Beaufort, North Carolina, and in one-time events like Oil-aholics Anonymous Day through ECOS. Last summer he volunteered at the national office of the Student Environmental Action Coalition, which sponsors national and regional conferences and serves as a resource for students with ecological concerns. With more than 150 people expressing an interest this year in the new Environmental Alliance, an umbrella organization encompassing a dozen campus environmental groups, Alexander says he's confident that environmentalism is flourishing at Duke.

Back at the Green House, residents work to change campus and community attitudes through consciousness-raising. By leading dorm talks and teaching a spring house course, acting as a resource for environmental information, and hosting twice-weekly vegetarian dinners for members of the Duke community, they will try to show people that their decisions about how to live can either destroy or preserve the environment. "We need to do more than just recycle," Jessica Barnhill says. "We need to think about our entire lifestyles." ■

Hazirjian '90 is a free-lance writer living in Durham. She will begin graduate school in history next fall.