

Features

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Green Samaritans

Class arms environmental crusaders

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Santa Fe Alliance Executive Director Vicki Pozzebon speaks to a Climate Masters class about the Farm to Restaurant program and sustainable farming issues.

On April 14, a group of concerned citizens descended upon the Santa Fe home of Bette Booth and scoured it for clues with the meticulousness of detective [Adrian Monk](#).

They weren't looking for evidence of a crime nor partaking in an odd daytime murder-mystery soirée. Instead, the group—members of a [Climate Masters](#) class put on by the state Environment Department—were investigating the energy-efficiency of class member Booth's home before undertaking a project to improve it.

Climate Masters is an 11-class series that covers everything from the basics of greenhouse gas formation to the impact of personal transportation on global warming. The classes are free, in exchange for each participant's 30 hours of community service in areas related to emissions reduction. Climate Masters is based on a University of Oregon pilot program, which boasts of reducing each participant's greenhouse gas emissions by 4,000 pounds by educating them about the impact of personal choices. Greenhouse Gases Outreach Coordinator Emily Geery teaches the class, with help from guest speakers such as environmental sustainability consultant Carrie McChesney and Santa Fe Alliance Executive Director Vicki Pozzabon, who runs the local [Farm to Restaurant](#) project. The group has also gone on field trips to the city's hydroelectric power plant and wastewater treatment plant, and taken the city bus (an adventure in itself) to see [Santa Fe Permaculture](#) founder Nate Downey's miniature farm, where he grows vegetables using harvested rainwater, and raises chickens and bees.

"Emily's done an incredible job of bringing in the top thinkers and doers in Santa Fe on the different topics that have been covered, and so all of [the classes] have been extremely interesting," Booth, who is also chairwoman of the Santa Fe Parks and Open Spaces Advisory Commission, says.

On April 6, the Climate Masters class was dedicated to food. Class members learned that 83 percent of food-related emissions come from production, while only 11 percent

come from transportation. In practical terms, this means eating food that takes a lot of energy to produce, such as beef, contributes more to carbon emissions than eating non-local food. Beef production causes emission of more than nine times the amount of carbon as an equivalent amount for chicken, Geery told the class. According to the New Mexico Climate Master Handbook used in the course, livestock use 30 percent of the world's land surface and create 18 percent of its carbon emissions.

Michelle Vattano, a NMED employee whose program helping New Mexico businesses reduce waste was just cut by Gov. Susana Martinez' administration, says she feels like consumer action is the missing piece of the puzzle, now that corporations are getting on board with environmental practices.

"I didn't realize when you go to a chain restaurant how much money really leaves the state," Vattano says. "I'm also learning things I can take home on how to measure my kilowatt usage and how to reduce my transport costs as a consumer."

Booth plans to use her new knowledge from the class to help inform decisions at POSAC.

"I want to introduce the whole issue of climate change into our discussions as we move forward in renovating old parks, and designing and building parks," Booth says.

The participants in the Climate Masters class SFR observed were anything but passive or complacent, swapping recommendations to watch the 2008 documentary Food, Inc. and read the work of slow food advocate Michael Pollan. At one point, a class member floated the idea to start a nonprofit promoting socially responsible business practices. The Climate Masters program appears to attract those who firmly believe in writer Margaret Mead's adage about the power of "a small group of thoughtful, committed people."

"The community members who participate in this program are really committed and are pretty outstanding," Geery says. "A lot of them are bringing this really diverse experience to the class, and it makes the class a lot richer and stronger to have such a variety of people in the class. I really appreciate that they are so committed."

Vattano is so committed to her larger environmental consulting mission that she plans to move to Colorado in the wake of Martinez' cuts to green programs; she also hopes Climate Masters empowers her in a smaller arena: the home front.

"I want to educate myself and take that information to my kids to talk about why we're not going to McDonald's today or why we're not going to Burger King anymore," Vattano says. "I don't eat there anyway but I think it's important because my kids go, 'Why do you say that, Mom, why do you put McDonald's down?' I now have an answer, whereas before I was like, 'Their food's gross.'"

Getting Warmer

Count climate change by the numbers.

Word used by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to express the strength of evidence that the earth's atmosphere and oceans are warming: **“unequivocal”**

According to the IPCC, the percent by which greenhouse gas emissions must decline by 2050 in order to avoid “dramatic temperature increases and the severe economic, social, and environmental impacts”: **80-90**

Percent increase in the methane concentration in the atmosphere due to human activity since 1750: **148**

In degrees Celsius, the increase in global temperatures that could lead to the elimination of male turtles, since the sex of a turtle is determined by the temperature at which its egg is incubated: **4**

In degrees Celsius, the full range of warming predicted for the 21st century: **1.11-6.38**

In degrees Celsius, the predicted amount of warming the Southwest will experience by the late 21st century: **7.8**

Predicted percentage reduction in Colorado River Basin storage by the late 21st century: **-40**

Together, the percentage of residential, energy-related emissions that come from space heating and cooling: **45**

In millions of tons of carbon dioxide, the total US emissions from space heating and cooling: **150**

Recommended temperatures at which to keep the heat and air conditioning, respectively: **67, 78**

Pounds of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere for every gallon of gasoline burned: **19.4**

Percentage of US greenhouse gas emissions that derive from transportation: **25**

Number of people who have completed the Climate Masters class: **125**

Number of hours volunteered by those 125 people: **700**

Sources: New Mexico Climate Master Handbook (2011), US Geological Survey, US Global Change Research Program, University of Arizona

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