

MEDIA RELEASE

Site 41 Protesters to Speak at Eco Forum

Five kilometers north of Elmvale, in Simcoe County, bubbling just below the surface, there lies what world-renowned scientist Professor William Shotyk refers to as “one of the most pristine water sources ever discovered”; so free of contaminants that it is comparable to core samples of Arctic ice over 5000 years old. Clearly, this water’s purity should set the standard by which Canada’s fresh waters should be measured. Instead, it was chosen by the local Council, and approved by the Province for an engineered landfill site.... “Site 41”.

Simcoe area resident, Stephen Ogden who led the fight to preserve the unique aquifer, will be one of two “Site 41” speakers at the August 26th Eco-Forum to be held at Trinity United Church in Shelburne. “I just thought it was the craziest thing we could ever want ...to put garbage in our water,” said Mr. Ogden. The second speaker will be Rev. David Black.

Rev. Black and his congregation from Ebenezer United Church near Midland were also part of the resistance to Site 41. The Reverend initiated a resolution at the church calling on the county and province to institute a 10-year moratorium on the dump. The congregation, Living Waters Presbytery, Toronto Conference and General Council all passed the resolution.

The proposed site, located on several aquifers and class one and two farmland, had residents concerned that the waste would contaminate drinking water for thousands of people. The Ministry of Environment (MOE) had admitted to area farmers that if Site 41 went ahead there would be restrictions on water taking permits, leaving farmers unable to grow crops which required irrigation.

Simcoe County's engineering consultant, Genivar, responded that the groundwater would be protected within MOE guidelines. The County seemed to have confidence that the dump would not damage groundwater, but Ogden and area residents didn't believe it.

The people of the Beausoleil First Nations, who live on Christian Island in the southern tip of Georgian Bay, felt contaminated water from Site 41 would threaten the health of the Bay and their way of life. During the summer of 2009, Vicki Monague, from the Beausoleil and four other Ojibwa women set up a protest camp at the entrances to the site.

In the *United Church Observer*, Monague said, the church members' support sustained her spirits, "We worked with the local United Church and held amazing ceremonies". Both David Black and Christian Island's Rev. Bright Young and their congregations supported the protesters with prayer and visits to the camp.

Events gained more media attention in September of 2009 when the Beausoleil spiritual leaders held an historic Midewiwin, or medicine dance, ceremony at the dump site. More than 100 people participated, most of them non-native, including several from Ebenezer United Church.

After a lengthy battle with County Council involving protests, rallies, and 18 arrests, the Provincial government finally revoked the certificate of approval for Site 41 in May, 2010.

Both speakers have fascinating stories about their journey to save Site 41 and what they learned about politics and community in a conflict that spanned over 20 years. Their reflections echo the sentiments of Dufferin residents currently facing planning issues that threaten drinking water: “We care about water, we care about our kids”, says Ogden. “If we don’t stop it, how do we explain it to our kids?”

The Eco-Forum runs from 7-9pm on Thursday, August 26th in the basement of Trinity United Church. Admission is free, coffee and light refreshments will be served.

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