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## **The GreenLife EcoFest**

I spent all of last weekend at the Fairgrounds attending the GreenLife EcoFest. Our company, Sustainable Energy Group, had a booth there. I gave a talk on “Your Best Energy Saving Investment Options” both days, and I displayed my all-electric vehicle as well. Since this was the first year of this event, none of us really knew what to expect. But with the event behind us now, I can say it didn't turn out as I had expected, but in a really good way.

While my professional focus is sustainable energy, my personal interests include sustainable living. The event turned out to be a rich and valuable experience for me, both personally and professionally. Because the attendance was lower than many expected, I can imagine many people reading this column weren't there. So in the process of filling you in a bit on what you missed I'll touch on what you can do to make up for your loss.

Sustainable living means “meeting our needs today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs”. The first half of that definition is something so many of us, if not most of us, are struggling with in this economy – meeting our needs today. And as far as the second half, I'm sure the majority of us would agree that we wouldn't want to compromise the ability of future generations to meet their needs.

The problem is most people aren't aware of the benefits that could improve the many challenges facing them today, especially the economic ones. That's a shame because if the general population were more aware of the benefits of sustainable living to our own households we would be inclined to live more sustainably. And that would not only help us all get by in this tough economy in the near term, but it would also make a brighter future for our children and future generations in the long term.

Sure, I was hopeful we could sign up new prospects interested in a solar power system or a home energy efficiency upgrade, and from that perspective the show was somewhat successful. But what I hadn't expected, and what really surprised, delighted and enlightened me, was the degree to which the event benefited me both personally and professionally. I've never experienced anything locally that came close to delivering anything like it.

For starters, the event gave me the opportunity to talk with all the other local purveyors of solar and energy efficiency. Having delivered solar and energy efficiency solutions to Nevada County for over 30 years now, I've known, admired and respected these folks since day one. We've always had more of a cooperative than competitive relationship, from sharing information and opinions about products, to congratulating each other during good times, to crying on each others shoulders during hard times. These are really good people, truly dedicated to helping improve people's lives. The EcoFest reminded me of a solar conference, wherein everyone comes away feeling energized, educated and enlightened. So if it can be something like that for me, just think of what the average person could have got from it!

I also took time to walk around and talk to other vendors and exhibitors at the event. In the process I got the latest and greatest insights into a wide variety of other sustainable living topics, from backyard chicken coops to growing my own food, to a whole host of new products to make life more affordable while also reducing my environmental impact. It refreshed my perspective and capability to live more sustainably on every level. And, as a result, I'll be saving still more money on a whole host of things in the coming months and living a happier, healthier lifestyle too.

Now, to make up for your loss, you can still at least see who the local companies you missed talking with, and being enlightened by, by going to the event web site -

<http://www.greenlifecofest.org>

This won't come close to what you could have gained from being at the event, but at this point I suppose it's the next best thing. I wouldn't miss next years event!

Lastly I should point out – admit, I suppose - that I'm not a big fan of the term “Green” (long story). I wasn't a big fan of the term “EcoFest” either when the event organizers were asking for input on names. I was concerned that the name of the event might dissuade “Mr and Mrs Middle America” from attending; that they might imagine the event would consist of nothing but a bunch of dread-locked hippies, dancing around recycling containers to Reggae music. After all, sustainable living is for everyone, not just “Hippies and Greenies”! So I was pleasantly surprised to see the vast majority of people there were just regular folks, looking to find ways to improve their life for the better. And I'm confident every one of them got what they came for!

*Ray Darby is President of Sustainable Energy Group Inc., a Grass Valley company offering energy efficiency and solar services for residential and commercial buildings, from comparing the alternatives through installation and servicing of energy systems of all types. You can reach him at 530-273-4422, via email [RayDarby@SustainableEnergyGroup.com](mailto:RayDarby@SustainableEnergyGroup.com), or visit their web site at [www.SustainableEnergyGroup.com](http://www.SustainableEnergyGroup.com).*