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Rochester Collaborates for Climate Change

Imagine a future in which the freshwater paradise and thriving vineyards that currently define Western New York are desolated by climate change. To those that believe climate change, rising water temperatures and the resulting disruption of water systems is not a local threat, the Rochester People's Climate Coalition (RPCC) is working to raise awareness, affect local policy and provide sustainable solutions.

"We're sort of in a cocoon here in Rochester," says George Payne, climate change activist and Leadership Team Member of the RPCC. "We're surrounded by some of the most precious lakes and fresh water sources in the world. People are not concerned about our warming winters. We don't have hurricanes, typhoons or tsunamis. If there's anywhere in the world where people can tune out and pretend that climate change doesn't affect them, it's Western New York."

The RPCC began in September 2014 as a way of organizing local participation in the People's Climate March in New York City. Since then it has emerged as a local leader in climate change policy, awareness and solutions. Consisting of nearly 70 organizations, the RPCC has become a magnet for groups of all kinds. From unions to schools to interfaith communities, the RPCC includes such organizations as the Sierra Club, League of Women Voters, Mothers Out Front, Citizen Climate Lobby, Gandhi Earth Keepers International and the City of Rochester. Arts groups Fast Forward Film Festival and the Mt. Hope World Singers have added their voices to the RPCC.

While the RPCC sees threats from climate change as being devastatingly varied, they also observe possibilities for positive changes. Together, the groups that make up the RPCC promote solutions on every possible level. Members like ROCSPOT and Renewable Rochester are professionals in solar energy. Airtight Services are green energy specialists. Rochester AFL-CIO represents a workforce eager for more green energy jobs.

Instead of taglines and public service announcements, the RPCC is devoted to bringing about lasting change and education. The coalition draws local attention to international actions such as the climate-related Paris Agreement of November 2015. It promotes the green

businesses of its members like Carbon Cutters, which uses 100 percent electric lawn care equipment. RPCC also collaborates with other organizations like the Sierra Club to provide opportunities for the public to meet climate change leaders such as former NASA research director James Hansen. Additionally, the RPCC has been invited to contribute ideas to the City of Rochester's Climate Action Plan.

Earth Week is an especially beneficial time for the RPCC. While the coalition promotes many events throughout the year, Earth Week provides an opportunity to reach a wider community. For this year's Earth Week, April 15 through 21, the RPCC will promote the Sierra Club's Annual Forum featuring filmmaker Keegan Kuhn's documentary *Cowspiracy*, which delves into an industry believed to be one of the planet's most destructive—animal agriculture. Other Earth Week events include a stress-reduction workshop, a youth summit, films and a state policy presentation.

The momentum and support gained by the RPCC since its inception presents an opportunity to affect even greater changes throughout the city. Looking forward, Payne sees the RPCC getting involved in making city homes more energy efficient, promoting sustainable transportation solutions, advocating tax credits for green corporations and educating the community in gardening and composting.

Although Rochester is not the first city to implement green action plans, the idea of a citywide climate coalition providing collaboration between city officials, communities and businesses is a relatively rare occurrence. As RPCC grows and finds footing as an organization, Payne hopes to see Rochester become an example for other cities. "If we can be a model for other cities throughout the world, how to get numerous organizations working together on one issue, representing all sectors of society—if we can show people how to do that, it would be a huge service," he says.

Although RPCC began as two busloads of passionate environmentalists that marched in New York City, their energy and excitement became the bedrock of the group. The RPCC is not only implementing the solutions of today but also looking forward to those of tomorrow. "We do not need to rely on cars to get to and from work. That's hard for most people to believe, but it's possible to create a transit system here in Rochester that meets people's needs," says Payne. "It's possible to encourage people to bicycle more often. It's possible to change the way that people get and use their energy."

Through all their efforts, the RPCC is working to maintain the green paradise that is Western New York. To aid in their endeavor, local organizations with a passion for the environment are invited to become members while individuals are invited to share, attend and volunteer for RPCC events.