

Local Resident Wins Clean Energy Award

By Richard Bercuson

It may not be the sexiest topic around the dinner table. However, what Canada is doing to transition to clean and renewable energy systems and how we go about it is the cornerstone of Sarah Petrean's career with Clean Energy Canada, a privately funded non-partisan NGO.

Last September, the Brooklin resident was the recipient of the Clean 50 Energy Leader Award which recognizes outstanding contributions to sustainable development and is given to those who have made out-sized contributions to the program.

During her time with the organization, a think-tank affiliated with Simon Fraser University, Petrean is merely following her heart from when she was a child. She recalls hearing about chloro fluoro carbons and the dangers of the diminishing ozone layer. Reduce, reuse and recycle was the mantra back then. She'd tell her parents not to toss sway straws, that everything had its purpose.

Political background
Life's twists and turns drew her into politics for a decade in various roles from being a communications director to a cabinet minister's chief of staff. However, those years were hardly wasted as her insider's knowledge of the political world has stood her in good stead in understanding how to deal with governments on this important topic.

"After politics," she says, "I decided to go back to my roots. I asked myself how I could make a difference and change things."

This led her to a stint as Director of Public Affairs for the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation. "I enjoyed my time there, but I really felt a piece of the puzzle was missing."

The pieces are falling into place for Petrean who works at determining what are good climate change action plans. For instance, with respect to government procurement - "a bit boring but super important" - she attempts to make governments understand the need to buy the right things. As she says, governments spend a lot. How and why are another matter.

Her recent article on the Clean Energy site (cleanenergycanada.org/people/sarah-petrean) was on that very topic.

"Consider the scale of government



procurement: it represents 13 percent of the combined GDP of OECD nations. Governments wield a tremendous amount of economic heft through the volume of goods and services they purchase. Procurement by all levels of government accounts for close to 33 percent of government expenditures across this country, or slightly more than 13 percent of Canada's entire GDP.

Canada can lead
"In short, procurement creates big demand, and demand helps create markets. By factoring carbon pollution into its procurement process, Canada can stimulate or lead markets in the direction of low-carbon goods and services. This is a tried-and-tested approach. At least 56 other national governments and many local ones use procurement to meet environmental and economic goals."

Over the next few years, Petrean says the impetus will be on convincing governments, specifically Ontario's, to make solid policy on climate change which, she admits, can seem like a scary subject.

The right direction
"The interesting thing we now see," she adds, "is that they're all talking about it. People see how there are implications to what governments do or not do. Certainly, we're heading in the right direction. It's a vastly different scene now than a few years ago. Even large companies like Shell are investing heavily in renewable energy. Others like HP are doing amazing things to reduce their carbon footprints."

As to Canada's contribution, Petrean feels that in some areas, we do quite well. "Parts of Canada, like Quebec and BC, are geographically blessed in that their electricity is hydro powered. Ontario's nuclear power has zero emissions. Then, on the other hand, you have the Alberta oil sands which has a huge carbon emissions component.

"We're not yet a leader, but that's not to say we can't be or won't be. Give it a bit of time. I sometimes wish people had more of mindset that we can do this vs. we can't. We need to get people, especially in politics where everyone just wants to get elected, to see this topic as a priority.

"The decisions we make today will indeed have an impact on tomorrow."

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