


Correction: Acton Junior Achievers are selling candles in wire baskets, not soaps, as reported last week. The New Tanner regrets the error. Also, information that the Valentine's Day baskets are available at Blue Springs Flower Shop and include a coupon for a Sweetheart rose, was removed from the story.

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SCHOLARSHIP WINNER: Adriann Coe, daughter of Rick and Linda Coe of Acton, has received a \$3,000 scholarship from the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation. A graduate of Bishop Reding Secondary school, Adriann is in her second year of sociology and psychology at the University of Western Ontario. - Submitted photo

Changing the face of business

Globalization, downsizing, competitiveness, rationalization - over the past decade, we've become so accustomed to buzzwords like these that we often assume that industries today must be highly efficient entities. Indeed, if we relied on media reports and advertising, we would conclude that the competitive demands of the global marketplace force corporations to be as lean and efficient as technically possible in all their processes.

But if that's true, then where does the pollution in our air, water and soil come from? After all, pollution is just waste, and waste is by definition inefficient. In fact, the current industrial system churns out an average of about 1,500 kilograms of waste for every 50 kilograms of product created! Isn't that a model of inefficiency?

For example, in spite of all the advances touted by automobile manufacturers, most modern vehicles are extremely wasteful. Just one per cent of the energy from the gasoline they consume actually accomplishes the end purpose of the vehicle, which is to transport the driver from place to place. The rest of the energy is wasted in the form of heat or exhaust gases (which contribute to air pollution and global warming), or is spent moving the massive weight of the vehicle itself.

The industrial revolution and its resulting technologies and innovations have brought us to previously unimagined levels of prosperity. Yet, while the world has changed, the philosophy that drives business - that of continued expansion and consumption of resources - remains the same as it was 200 years ago when there were far fewer people on Earth and far more resources available.

In their new book "Natural Capitalism" Paul Hawken and Amory and Hunter Lovins surmise that the reason our industrial system is so tremendously wasteful is because it fails to take into account the true value of "natural capital" - that is, all the natural resources of the earth, as well as the services they provide, such as purifying our air and water. These amazing services, which nourish us and maintain our

Science Matters

- by David Suzuki



health, are taken for granted because the earth provides them free.

But while the services are free, degrading the factors that maintain them - things like groundwater, the atmosphere, topsoil and forests - inflict a tremendous cost. As these resources are depleted, so is their ability to provide essential life services. Today this is evident the world over in the form of falling water tables, crashing fish stocks, and our changing climate.

Hawken and Lovins argue that to correct this misalignment will require a radical shift to an industrial system that recognizes the value of natural capital. Such a system would necessitate a many-fold increase in energy efficiency, closed loop systems where waste products are recycled and reused, and a transition from seeing products as disposable goods to recognizing them as services. Many of the technologies for these processes exist now, and are being used by a number of industrial pioneers on the leading edge of what will be the next industrial revolution.

Still, some continue to argue we have to sacrifice our natural resources to maintain a high standard of living. But this position is fast losing strength. In the Jan. 20 edition of Nature, biologist Gretchen Daily and Brian Walker say that such an argument is analogous to the view held by some 19th century businessmen that slavery was an essential element to an economic system. According to Daily and Walker, the transition to an environmentally sustainable economy will be achievable if governments provide incentives, the public demands action and industries recognize the value of such a transition.

It's a fundamental change - but one that is in the best interest of all of us, for even the most conservative of business leaders must recognize that without healthy living systems, a healthy economy is both impossible and irrelevant.

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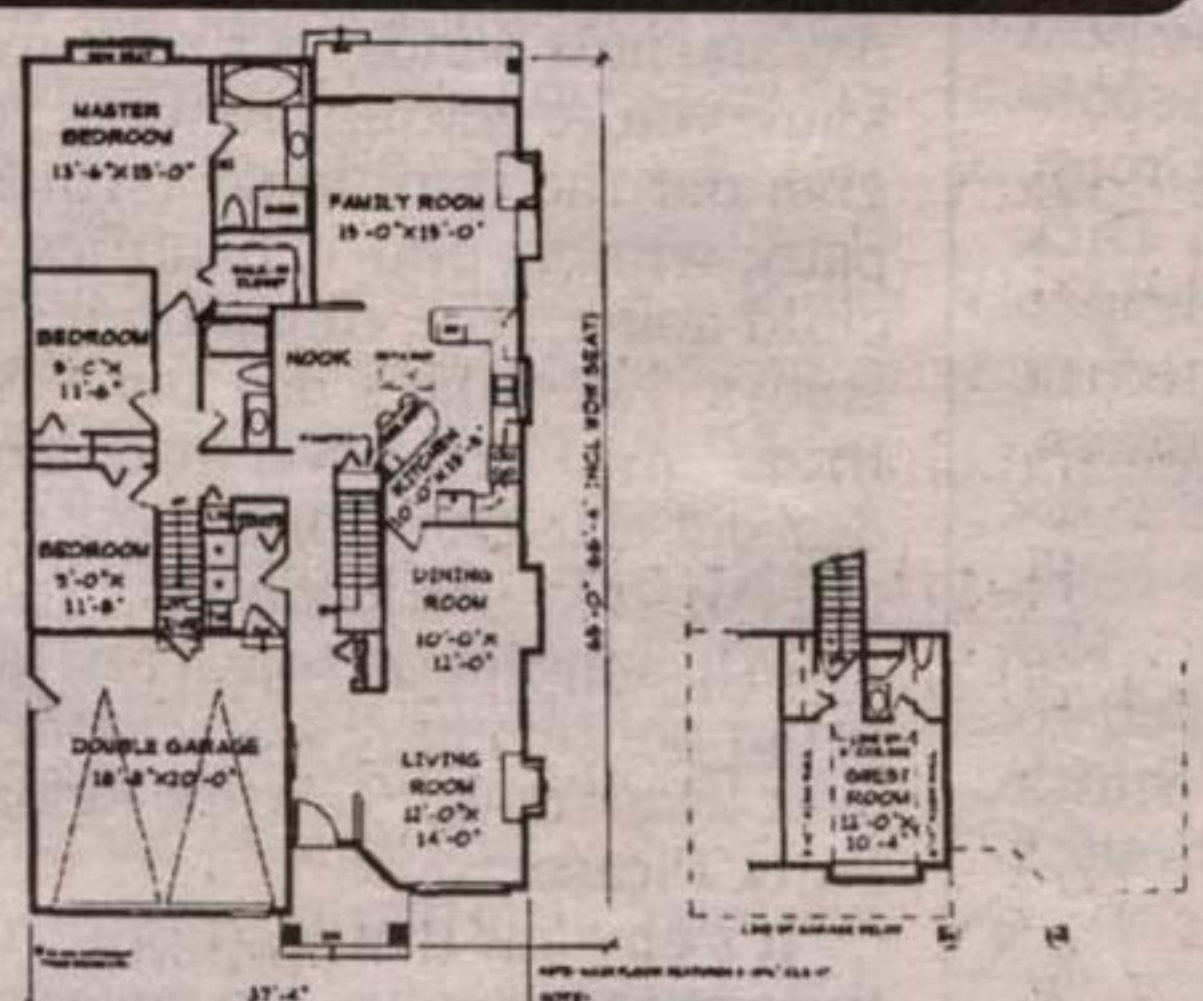
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