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# Marketing and consumer attitudes targeted at consumerism seminar

by Dianne Cornish

"If we're going to be environmentally-conscious, we can no longer be spontaneous shoppers," a group of 40 Georgetown and area residents were told Wednesday at a Wastewise consumerism seminar.

Ken Arnold, president of an Oakville-based consulting company and retail store which sells environmentally-safer products, told members of the audience not to underestimate their intelligence or power when it comes to what they choose to buy.

Arnold was one of two speakers at the seminar, which also featured Toronto resident Suanne Kelman, creator of CBC Radio's two-part series entitled, "Shopping Spree."

She warned the audience at the outset of her talk: "I'm here with the bad news." True to her words, she said no one is immune to the marketing pressures directed at them through visual and print advertising.

"It's going to be difficult to reverse that conditioning," she added.

Kelman later said that being environmentally conscious will have to become a much more fashionable way of life before it gains widespread acceptance.

"We have to make it worthwhile, psychologically, to use environmentally-safer products," she stressed.

The radio broadcaster said that messages through the media and on television do not encourage consumers to be a conserving society. On the contrary, through advertising, they encourage people to buy products, she remarked.

Messages that raise environmental consciousness need to be inserted into television programs, Kelman contended.

"We need to see people in soap operas going out to their blue box. Until it (a practice) becomes normal, public attitudes won't change," she said.

She cited public campaigns



Georgetown resident Don McLean makes his point during an informal discussion Wednesday night with Suanne Kelman, a guest speaker at the Wastewise consumerism seminar. McLean told Kelman that greater environmental consciousness will come in time because necessity will dictate that we make lifestyle changes to protect our environment.

against smoking, along with drinking and driving, as two successful examples of changing social values. However, she indicated later that she does not see much hope for environmentally-conscious consumerism becoming "fashionable" in the immediate future.

"I don't see what will stop" our traditional trends in shopping, she said.

Arnold took a different approach, telling members of the audience that they can change consumerism by "starting a trend." He advocated knowledgeable consumerism, with shoppers asking retailers to explain the contents of certain products, such as shampoos and soaps, and their potential effects on the environment.

"In Canada, manufacturers don't have to label consumer products (with lists of contents), unless the products are edible," Arnold said.

He said consumers should reduce or re-use products and failing that he urged people "to ask questions" and exercise a third "R": "Refuse it."

If a retailer cannot tell a consumer what is in a product, the consumer should put it back on the shelf, Arnold argued. "Start a trend," so that retailers and manufacturers will respond to consumer demands, he urged.

The Oakville businessman also warned people to be wary of products which are marketed as "environmentally friendly."

The phrase, "environmentally-friendly product" is a misnomer, he said. Anything that is a product was made through the use of resources, requiring energy and, therefore, affecting the environment, he said.

Arnold suggested that a more correct term for a product which is environmentally sensitive would be "environmentally-safer." However, he also warned that, in many cases, green products are "a pure and simple marketing ploy."

Items labeled as "environmentally friendly" should be viewed with suspicion, he said. "Nine times out of 10, it's a sham."

Arnold claimed that marketers often treat consumers as though they are "people with intellects at a Grade 3 level." Consumers are "more intelligent" and have the ability to think about alternatives when spending their shopping dollars, he said.

"The life cycle of a product" is also an important consideration when making a decision to purchase.

"When you make a purchase,

think in terms of the product's life cycle—how was it made, can it be re-used, how do I dispose of it," Arnold said.

Most audience members making comments during the seminar voiced concerns about products and their packaging. One man suggested that Canada should adopt the practices of some European countries like Germany and Holland, where consumers can leave the packaging of a product with the retailer, who then returns it to the manufacturer who is obligated to pay for its disposal.

A woman said consumer power has made a difference in the packaging of a leading brand-name toothpaste.

When Kelman indicated that she did not see what would act as "a carrot" to encourage manufacturers to address environmental concerns, a female member of the audience asked, "Don't you think the carrot will be necessity?"

The woman said people know that, unless they pay heed to the environment, "we are going to destroy ourselves."

Wednesday's seminar was the first of three being held at Wastewise this summer. Bill Wray and Marina Biasutti, members of the Environmental Youth Corps working at the waste reduction and recycling centre, are organizing the public information meetings.

The next seminar will focus on "Vegetarianism and Nutrition" and will be held August 12. The final meeting will be held August 19 when the topic will be, "How to have a Chemical-Free Home on a Budget."

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## Harvey's to build new local outlet

Continued from page 1

the land was established some time ago. It is expected that the site plan agreement will be presented to council in August.

Local builder Don Ricciuto is the developer of the proposal. The Harvey's Plus outlet will feature burgers and Swiss Chalet chicken and will offer take-out and eat-in facilities.

At a site plan review committee

meeting, Monday at the Halton Hills Civic Centre, discussions on the proposal centred around residential neighborhood concerns that odor emissions from the exhaust stand might be a problem. However, the committee was told by a Harvey's representative that the restaurant has recently converted its charcoal ovens to gas-burning ovens, with the result that food odors will be minimal.