

Promising Practices



Non-Profits

Ottawa Folk Festival Reduces Energy On and Off Site

In recent years, the Ottawa Folk Festival, an annual tradition since 1994, has been committed to being green. The festival organizers realised the potential negative environmental impacts of numerous people coming together in such a small space and saw an opportunity not only to reduce the festival's ecological footprint, but also to "inspir[e] others to become greener."¹

The Folk Festival's Green Team, established in 2008, implemented a variety of sustainable initiatives. They source food for volunteer lunches from the Lansdowne Farmers' Market. By purchasing local food, they reduce the energy and greenhouse gas emissions associated with the transportation of food over great distances. The festival site is vehicle-free: volunteers use cargo tricycles to transport equipment and supplies. Green printing services are used for promotional materials, banners and t-shirts.²

Renewable Energy Helps Divert Waste

The Green Team makes great efforts to reduce waste produced during the event. Signage was improved to direct festival attendees to recycle paper, plastic, metal and glass. The festival also has food waste composting, drastically reducing waste created by food services. About 20 volunteers work to ensure there is no litter on the festival grounds, and are sure to divert as much of the waste from the landfill as possible.³

The Ottawa Folk Festival owns reusable cutlery along with about 2,500 reusable plates and 1,000 bowls. It has a solar water heater that is able to heat up water sufficiently for dish washing, even on cloudy days.⁴ These dishes have helped other community organizations become more environmentally friendly, as the festival lends them

out to interested parties.⁵ The festival partnered with its beer and wine vendors to ensure that all cups used were compostable, made from biodegradable plant-based plastics instead of petroleum-based plastic. The cup collapses after it is left in sun for about an hour. The petroleum reduced this way is significant, since the festival goes through about 50 to 55 kegs.

Cupsuckers Energy Efficient

Cupsuckers are cylindrical cup collectors that can be attached to the outside of garbage bins, keeping the collection of biodegradable cups separate from the garbage. Cups are stacked, enabling each cupsucker to hold 138 cups (and more, since cups can be stacked beyond the top of the collector).⁶ At the end of the day, the cupsuckers are emptied and the cups are placed into separate bags and sent to a composter instead of the landfill. Cupsuckers have gained popularity and are now used at other festivals, including the Ottawa Dragon Boat Festival.⁷

By stacking the cups, cupsuckers reduce up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the volume of waste normally generated by cups. Thus fewer bags are needed to dispose of them, and a smaller container can be used to transport the cups to the composter, reducing fossil fuel emissions.⁸

Disposable Water Bottle Ban

According to a 2009 study, bottled water uses up to 2,000 times more energy than tap water. While the energy is primarily used for the production and transportation of the bottles, energy is also used for processing, bottling, sealing, labelling, and refrigerating the water.⁹ In response to this, the festival organizers made municipal water available to concert-goers, who have enthusiastically responded by bringing their own bottles or buying a reusable one at the festival. Event Water Solutions triple filters and

treats the municipal water with UV rays.¹⁰ The Green Team first made water stations to refill reusable water bottles with municipal water available in 2008. The success of the stations led to the festival going plastic water bottle free in 2009, thanks to support from Ottawa Riverkeeper, CUPE, The Water Store and The Council of Canadians. In its first year, the ban on the sale of disposable water bottles diverted almost 8,000 bottles from the landfill.¹¹

Ottawa Folk Festival is now taking the lead on a project with other local festivals to make municipal water delivery available at all community gatherings, proving that its commitment to sustainability lasts beyond the concerts.

Kinetic Energy Powers Concert

The Folk Festival invites eco-conscious bands to play. In 2009, Mr. Something Something put on one of its Sound Cycle shows in which audience members cycle to generate the power that their show runs off of.¹²

Environmental Education

In 2003, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) began hosting the CUPE EnviroTent. The purpose of the tent is to encourage attendees to lead an environmentally-responsible life. Attendees are engaged via discussions, hands-on activities and displays. Some of the issues covered by the tent in the past include: vermicomposting; the organic food movement; fair trade products; alternative sources of energy; pesticides; veganism; getting back to nature; getting butterflies to visit your backyard; terminator seeds; and environmental politics.¹³

Festival organizers hope that by the end of the festival, they are able to inspire festival attendees not only with good music, but also with a newfound appreciation for the environment. One of the promising practices of the festival is that the sustainability committee is always interested in talking about their plans with the public. They want to collaborate with others by sharing best practices and getting recommendations from other festivals to improve their green efforts.¹⁴

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Ana Miura
Sponsorship Manager, Ottawa Folk Festival
Phone: 613-230-8234 ext: 304
Email: amiura@ottawafolk.com

This Promising Practice was brought to you by
Ecology Ottawa on behalf of the
Community Energy Network of Eastern Ontario
*Encouraging the uptake of renewable energy and energy
efficiency initiatives*

www.community-energy.ca



The Network gratefully acknowledges the support of
the Ontario Trillium Foundation



References:

- ¹ Adambrot. "Ottawa Folk Festival Green Initiatives 2010." *YouTube*. 15 October 2010. www.youtube.com/watch?v=-sh-uvWPeQs. Accessed June 2011.
- ² MacPhee, J. A History of the Ottawa Folk Festival. *Ottawa Folk Festival*. 1 June 2011. <http://ottawafolk.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/history1994-2009-style-revised-01jun2011.pdf>. Accessed June 2011.
- ³ Supra note 1.
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Morrison, J. "Green Initiatives." Ottawa Folk Festival. Website text. http://ottawafolk.com/?page_id=390. Accessed July 2011.
- ⁶ Cupsucker. "FAQ." Blue Heron Solutions, website text. <http://cupsucker.com/faq.htm>. Accessed June 2011.
- ⁷ Supra note 1.
- ⁸ Cupsucker. "FAQ." Blue Heron Solutions, website text. <http://cupsucker.com/faq.htm>. Accessed June 2011.
- ⁹ Gleick, PH and Cooley, HS. "Energy Implications of Bottled Water." *IOP Science*. Feb 19 2009. <http://stacks.iop.org/ERL/4/014009>. Accessed June 2011.
- ¹⁰ Supra note 1.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Supra note 5.
- ¹³ Supra note 2.
- ¹⁴ Supra note 1.

