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Climate Change Conference Draws Crowd

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MANCHESTER -- Like many others who attended the conference on global climate change Saturday at Manchester Community College, Donald Hoyle has a passionate interest in the subject as well as a measure of anxiety about what the next century will bring.

"I have grandchildren, and I'd like to leave this earth in as good or better shape than I received it," Hoyle, 72, of Mansfield Center, said amid presentations suggesting problems are inevitable unless significant changes are made.

The conference was designed to raise awareness and suggest strategies to deal with warming trends that some experts believe could have catastrophic consequences.

"Our legacy is really at stake here," said Anji Seth, a climate scientist at the University of Connecticut, who gave a slide show that examined subjects such as the exponential proliferation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.

She noted that in the Hartford area, the temperature usually exceeds 90 degrees about 15 days each year. However, unless changes are made to reduce emissions, Seth said, by the end of the century Hartford could have about 80 days annually of 90-degree temperatures.

"We have significant choices to make, and they will make a difference," she said.

Johan Varekamp, a Wesleyan University earth science professor, and Bryan Garcia, of the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund, also spoke before the crowd of about 100.

Tied into the event was an "empty bowls" fundraiser sponsored by Foodshare and run with the help of a seventh-grade Girl Scout troop from St. James School in Manchester.

For Alex Kaminsky, a 9-year-old from Glastonbury who attended the conference with his mother, Michele, the prospect of extreme temperatures is worrisome.

"I don't like it too hot or too cold - period," Alex said after enthusiastically explaining how plants remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere only to have it return when humans and other animals breathe.

Michele Kaminsky, who is taking an earth science class at Eastern Connecticut State

University and went to the conference on the recommendation of her professor, said she wishes that environmental issues received more attention.

Vishnu Khade, who teaches at both Eastern and MCC, said Kaminsky was among 25 of his students who attended the conference.

Khade said he fears that many people are too self-absorbed to recognize the importance of reducing emissions, preserving energy and making other changes that would protect the environment.

"We are a very capitalistic, consumer-oriented society," he said, noting that "people are more into getting a flat-screen TV than worrying about some island going under water."

For those inclined to make ecology-friendly lifestyle adjustments, conference organizers distributed literature that included suggestions such as reducing fertilizer use and installing compact fluorescent light bulbs.

Hoyle has taken more dramatic steps.

His house, a 2,000-square-foot split-level ranch, has a geothermic system that draws heat through a 200-foot well. He also uses a photovoltaic system to convert sunlight into energy.

Hoyle's house has been featured in the Northeast Sustainable Energy Association's annual green buildings open house tour.

He said 79 people came through when the event was held earlier this month, compared with about 30 a year ago.

"People have gotten scared," he said. "They are beginning to accept the fact that we could make it so this earth is not inhabitable anymore."

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