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Earth Day should teach several valuable lessons



Sunday's Earth Day celebration featured great speakers, activities, information booths and people. If you attended, you probably came away from Peace Park with a handful of good information, lots of ideas and at least some knowledge about organizations you never knew existed. But what were the important messages you took home from Earth Day? Here are a few I came away with.

EARTH DAY EVERY DAY

In the long run, Earth Day will not mean much unless we commit to living every day in a more environmentally sound way. We need to set environmental goals for ourselves. For example, one could set a goal of increasing home energy efficiency, car pooling to work or using less water.

You might even make an "Earth Day Resolution." Pledge to do something daily to decrease your environmental impact. You could pledge to take only short showers or to make double-sided photocopies. If you are one who continually sends me mail about how there can't possibly be a population problem, you could resolve to examine in detail the issues relating to rapid population growth.

I resolve to live the next year without eating meat. This means less water, land and energy will be used to grow my food. It also will help reduce soil erosion while increasing the amount of food available for the rest of the world. It will be interesting to follow a diet similar to that of most of the world — a meatless diet.

BECOMING GOOD STEWARDS

Creating a sustainable world for future generations will take more than simple acts — it will require that we embrace our role as stewards of the planet's natural wealth.

"If we all did 50 simple things to save the planet, that would be a big

help," writes environmental author Donella Meadows. "But it wouldn't be enough. The planet — or more accurately our civilization and the natural systems that support it — needs more than easy gestures to be saved."

"I think everyone knows that. We know that what's needed is an end to our wild population growth and our untrammelled greed. What's needed is real stewardship. Sometimes I think we get enthusiastic about low-flow faucets and high-mileage cars because they give us the feeling of doing good without seriously challenging our lifestyle."

Everyone — from teachers and students to truck drivers and real estate agents — needs to recognize our role as stewards of the environment and the duty we have to adopt lifestyles that will allow future generations to enjoy our natural world.

CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

Protecting our future and environment is too important a job for government alone — bureaucracies are ill equipped to deal with the complexities of building a sustainable future for our planet. Citizens and government need to work together.

A good example of this is the Missouri Stream Team. This program, coordinated by the Missouri conservation and natural resources departments, allows citizens to adopt streams and take responsibility for their well being — clearing it of trash, monitoring water quality or doing whatever is necessary. More than 7,000 people participate.

The stream team and similar programs have clearly demonstrated that government is best at facilitating. Without direct citizen involvement, no government can adequately conserve the environment.