Sorting trash: Street Festival adopts composting system

This year, for the first time, the Takoma Park Street Festival included an option for composting. The City of Takoma Park provided three-part receptacles to separate trash, recycling and composting in an effort to promote environmental sustainability.

The festival is an integral part of the local economy, supporting local businesses and vendors. To keep it from being an environmental burden, the city introduced composting, so that the economic benefit could extend and include the benefits of composting: reducing waste sent to landfills, returning nutrients to the land, controlling runoff and naturally fertilizing soil.

As student volunteers, we stood at the trash stations to inform attendees about how to sort their garbage. We were also responsible for speaking to attendees about their opinions on composting at the festival and composting in general.

Many people did not realize that napkins, food-soiled paper plates, wax, wooden sticks and coffee cups with the biocompostable symbol were compostable. Some were surprised to hear that they could even compost bones, meat and dairy products. Since Takoma Park does not recycle Number 6 plastic, the only items we encourage people to trash at our stations were Number 6 plastic utensils and contaminated aluminum foil used to wrap food.

When asked what would help with the composting process, festival attendees suggested the placement of signs near the bins with pictures describing what went where. Some people just walked past and disposed of their containers in the landfill receptacle, without pausing to examine the options. Most people noticed the options but hesitated, unsure of whether they were using the system correctly. Even though some attendees claimed that the presence of volunteers was unnecessary, we observed that one stand without a volunteer had more waste in the trash receptacle, including items that could have been recycled or composted.

Overall, festival participants supported the initiative and were willing to listen to directions about how to dispose of their trash. Many attendees already knew what composting was since they were composting at home, or were participating in the curbside compost pickup system available to some Takoma Park residents; however, those who were not knowledgeable were more than willing to participate, and some were even eager to learn more about composting and how it could be made available to them outside of the festival.

Contamination in compost makes the composting process less efficient; thus, by helping to ensure the purity of the compost, we were able to make the process as cost effective and eco-friendly as possible. Overall, many agreed that the best way to help the environment is to promote education about proper waste disposal, especially from a young age, and to spread awareness of the option to compost in general.

This article was contributed by University of Maryland students Kimia Abtahi, Irene Chern, Radina Mutskova and Mitchell Rock

Alternative Gift Fair is a tradition in generosity

Takoma Park's twist on holiday gift-giving is returning, allowing shoppers to reach beyond the usual gift-wrapped presents and give gifts that make a difference. At the 16th Annual Takoma Park Alternative Gift Fair on Saturday, Dec. 6 at the Takoma Park Presbyterian Church (310 Tulip Ave.), participants can "shop" among 16 charitable organizations, then donate in the name of friends and family.

Among the "gift" choices will be one week of fresh, local veggies for a low-income family; two visits to a mom or baby from a nurse-midwife in Malawi; and a violence prevention outreach session at a local school.

Gift prices start at $5; gifts are tax-deductible and include a certificate to drop into a holiday card. Checks, cash and credit cards are accepted; 100 percent of the money goes to the charities at the fair.

The fair also features a supervised children's corner, cookie-decorating for area residents who are homebound, a bake sale, live music and free seated shoulder/back massage.

For more information contact Mimi Iklé-Khalsa, aggw_inc@yahoo.com.

New co-op reduces cost of going solar

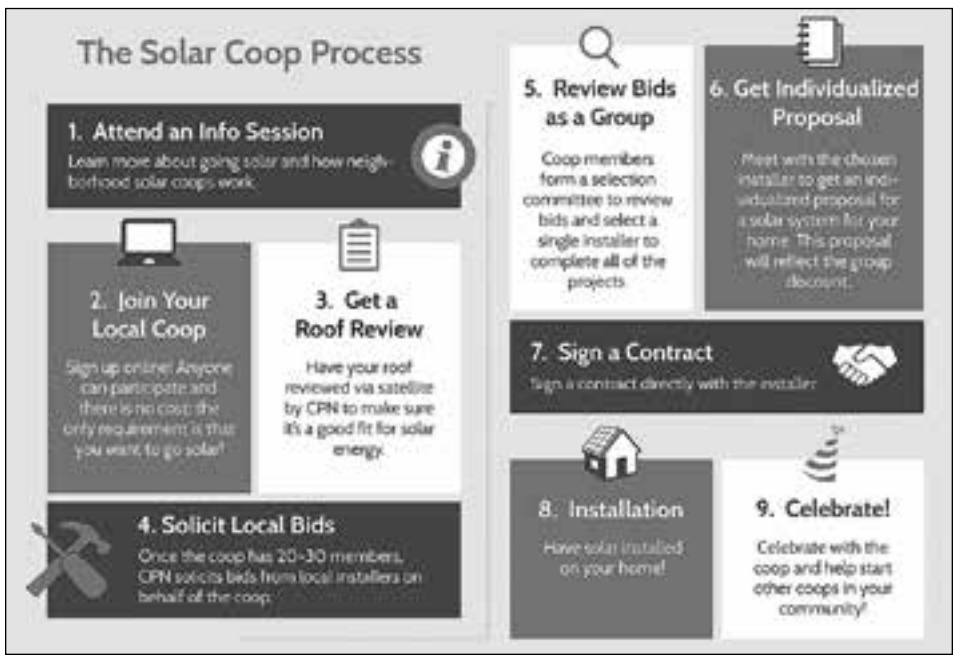
Solar panels are becoming a common sight in the area, and now there is a new group that can help residents explore whether solar makes sense for their homes—and give them a significant discount if they decide to buy in.

The Takoma Park Silver Spring Solar Co-op is being organized by the City of Takoma Park, Community Power Network (CPN), and CPN's project MD SUN.

Any homeowner or small business located in Takoma Park, Silver Spring or a surrounding neighborhood in Maryland is welcome to join. Based on the same principal as buying in bulk, co-op members will go through the process of purchasing solar systems together. The group will select a single contractor to install systems on all of the homes and businesses, but each participant will sign his or her own contract with the chosen installer.

By going solar as a group, members will save 30 percent off the cost of a solar system. They'll also have the support of the co-op and experts at CPN instead of having to go it alone.

To learn more and sign up go to http://mdsun.org/solar-bulk-purchases/takoma-park-solar-coop. The next Solar Co-op meeting will be at the Community Center on Dec. 10, at 7 p.m.



Clean it up!

Takoma Park's Anti-Litter Initiative is in full effect at the Takoma/Langley Crossroads. The self-named "Flaming Marshmallows," a group of students from Takoma Academy, cleaned up The New Ave on Oct. 21 for their Fall Service Day, with help from city staffer Lucy Neher, far right. More than 50 bags of trash were collected at three sites around the city.

Residents will have a chance to participate in a clean-up on Saturday, Nov. 15 from 10 to 11:30 a.m., starting at 6900 New Hampshire Ave. and stretching north on New Hampshire Avenue to University Boulevard. Gloves, vests and bags will be provided, with refreshments afterwards at Starbucks. This cleanup is led by the Takoma Langley Development Authority. To volunteer, contact Melanie Isis, misis@takomalangley.org.

Meanwhile, the city has targeted the site near 7676 New Hampshire Ave. between the bus shelter and Holton Lane for landscape improvements and wants to hear from neighbors and businesses at a community workshop on Nov. 20 at 7676 New Hampshire Ave. (see notice on page 4).