

Portsmouth Sustainability Fair draws a crowd

City holds 1st fair to raise awareness

By [Adam Leech](#)

aleech@seacoastonline.com

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PORTSMOUTH — Hundreds of people crowded Parrott Avenue Saturday for the city's inaugural Sustainability Fair, featuring speakers, exhibits, events and retailers with a common theme of going green.

The idea for the fair came out of the Portsmouth Listens study circles on sustainability as a way to raise awareness, celebrate the city's efforts toward a more sustainable city and to show people how to live in a sustainable manner.

The setting of the fair was inside and outside the Portsmouth Middle School and public library. The library is the first municipal building certified by the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design in the state and the school is planned to be LEED-certified as well, after it is renovated.

Dozens of booths were set up between the two buildings selling organic food or green products, while other organizations were there to educate and spread information about their group.

Jim Noucas, co-chairman of Portsmouth Listens, and his family stood at the entrance and signed people up for the sustainability pledge — a document signed by individuals promising to do more to be sustainable.

"The goal of the fair is to have everybody take something they can do to help make their home and community more sustainable," said Noucas. "We're asking them to fill out a form and tell us what they can do."

More than a dozen groups offered educational activities, such as the Blue Ocean Society, which organized Peirce Island and South Mill Pond clean-ups, as well as brought a life-sized, 60-foot inflatable finback whale. Children and their parents were challenged by an educational "scavenger hunt" where they answered questions on sustainability and got to create personalized pins.

Resident Karen Lloyd and her two young children started the day playing with a variety of ocean creatures that were part of a UNH exhibit. She said the fair was a great learning opportunity for the kids and herself.

"It just seemed like a good community activity to get the kids involved with sustainability, learn more about how we can become more green and help the environment," she said.

Vendors sold a wide variety of green things. Ken Perry of Red Worms for Green Earth in Rollinsford sold worm farms that also dispose of organic garbage and create excellent compost. It's a business he's run for five years and has been successful. "I always wanted to do something in farming, but never had much land, but I did have warehouse space," he said. "What else would I do but build a worm farm?"

"I do about 20 events a year and a themed event like this is really good. This is a great event," he said.

Bert Cohen, a UNH professor on sustainability and co-founder of Piscataqua Sustainability Initiative, started the fair with opening remarks on the importance of a "systems approach" to sustainability, where it is infused in everything that the community does.

The phrase "change happens one person at time" might be true, he said, but to address an imminent threat such as global warming will require more than one person at a time.

"That's probably not the way it's going to happen," he said. "It's going to be a network of people who bring everyone together to create change. That's what we're doing this morning."