

Theresa Lehman column: It's in our interests to keep it clean

April 25, 2010

Wisconsin is notably recognized as an environmental leader.

In 1970, Wisconsin Sen. Gaylord Nelson, founder of **Earth Day**, said, "If we have a right that is more important than any other right, it is the right to live in a clean environment." Forty years later, Earth Day is observed worldwide by millions, and Wisconsin has many green victories to celebrate.

The Native American Proverb says, "Treat the Earth well: it was not given to you by your **parents**, it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children."

Conservation champions such as Gaylord Nelson, Aldo Leopold, John Muir, private businesses, nonprofit organizations, educational institutes, government agencies and individuals have embraced this proverb and have created ecological partnerships that bring environmental challenges to the public **forefront**. In turn, this has allowed people to share a common understanding enabling behaviors and beliefs, which have created smart environmentally sensitive solutions.

As "children" do we know how fortunate we are that we now have the "right" to enjoy what their legacy has left for us in protecting these human and environmental "rights"?

What would our **health** be like, our landscape look

like, or Wisconsin's economic state be like if there were no such things such as the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the Great Lakes Compact, the Outdoor Recreation Program or building codes that protected people and the environment?

Imagine the Fox Cities' waterways being stagnant, forests clear-cut, the **luxury** of hunting and fishing nonexistent. What would this do to our economy? Imagine not knowing what the stars looked like at night, or not knowing what time the sun rises or sets because the sky is filled with smog. What would your day be like if you didn't have access to cold, drinkable water? How would your day be affected if consisted of rolling blackouts?

So how do you describe what it's like to live in Wisconsin? Many visitors describe Wisconsin's many rivers, lakes and forests simply as **beautiful**. Residents describe Wisconsin as a wonderful place to raise a family. I describe Wisconsin as home. We are incredibly fortunate to live in a place where environmental leadership has been a strong-hold. Each of us must to recognize this and continue to propel this legacy.

Traditionally celebrated April 22, Earth Day is an important day to remember to "reduce, reuse and recycle" and be an environmental advocate. However, it's the choices we make every day that are critical to environmental protection. It should be respected and celebrated every day.

We have been a leader in an uphill challenge. Recognizing there is still a long road ahead, how will you embrace sustainability to **enhance** the health and well-being of people, reduce environmental impacts, and contribute to economic success?

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