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First Sustainability Week offers activities for everyone

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From October 17 to 21, IIT celebrated its first Sustainability Week with a broad range of activities for students, staff and faculty that showcased our commitment to environmental sustainability.

Events got underway a little early on Friday, October 14, when a group of 20 or so students got together to clean up the 31st Street beach, as part of the Engineering Themes: Water event. Several large bags' worth of trash was collected as the students were able to substantially improve this family-oriented Bronzeville destination with only a few hours of hard work.

Sustainability Week was officially kicked off on Monday, October 17, by a farmers market greeting students on their approach to the MTCC.

The student organization Engineers for a Sustainable World (formerly known as ganGreen) organized a collection of vendors, including local farmers, bakers and drink makers to provide locally grown or made food and drink options for IIT and the surrounding community.

Some fierce wind added an unusual challenge to the typically docile activity of food shopping, but the large showing proved the market was a hit with nearly everyone. B-True Bakery, with their awesome \$1 muffins and cookies, was a particularly big hit.

On Thursday, October 20, Hermann Hall was the place to be, as Engineers for a Sustainable World and Net Impact hosted the first ever IIT Green Resource Opportunity Fair. This event brought local green-oriented companies, clubs and organizations together so that students could browse and talk with green employers and find out what's going on in the sustainability field in Chicago.

There was an impressive array of participants including Zipcar, PNC Bank, Active Transport Alliance, Blue Star Energy, the Green Chicago Restaurant Co-op and many

others. The Fair included several talks on sustainability including a notable talk on alternative energy by IIT Prof. Hamid Arastoopour, Director of WISER.

However, the spotlight was stolen by the Working Bike Cooperative, whose ingenious bike-powered appliances allowed the Fair attendees to generate the power to play a record machine and test their strength to light up a series of ever more difficult light bulbs. Both participating organizations and students got a lot out of the fair, so chances are high for a second edition next year.

Sustainability Week was rounded out with a salute to alternative forms of transportation (and its riders) on Friday morning in Hermann Hall. Those that take alternative transportation to get to IIT (it's kind of hard not to with all the El, Metra, bus, bike, carpool and walking options available) were treated to a great breakfast and the opportunity to mingle with their fellow "environmental do-gooders."

A solid 25 people showed on this cold, early morning to get their well-deserved gold star for being sustainable in their daily commute, but the Sustainability Week festivities didn't end there!

Thursday, October 27, saw the Office of Campus Energy & Sustainability hold an Electronic Waste Recycling Day. In conjunction with local e-waste collector Recycle Tech Solutions, Elizabeth Mauban from OCES braved the early cold and rain to collect over 4 car-loads of electronic waste.

This included students' cell phones, laptops, cameras, printer cartridges and some old behemoth computers, printers and monitors from various offices on campus. All this electronic waste will be recycled in an environmentally responsible manner with none of it going to landfills. Due to the success and popularity of the event, Director of Sustainability Joseph Clair has decided to repeat this event on a regular basis.

A fitting conclusion to IIT's extended Sustainability Week activities was the



Photo by Christina Noonan

second Sustainability Forum of the year last Friday, October 28. The topic of this month's forum, hosted by the Office of Campus Energy & Sustainability, was on how to balance historic building preservation with the need for energy efficiency. While the topic was geared a bit more toward architects, it is certainly widely applicable, especially in this land of Mies.

After a wonderful organic lunch, (with tasty coconut macaroons for dessert) the forum got underway with William Paschal introducing the two speakers; Ellen Stoner & Sachin Anan. Ms. Stoner is a Founding Principal at Altus Works, Inc., with a focus on continuing and expanding the use of existing/historic buildings. Mr. Anan is a Principal at dBHMS and an adjunct professor in the College of Architecture with an uncompromising approach to quality and a talent for merging efficiency and design.

Each speaker presented for 10-15 minutes, bringing the audience along as they outlined their work and strategies for dealing with existing and particularly historic buildings.

Ms. Stoner explained how sustainability and preservation are really two sides of the same coin with existing buildings often being built for longer life spans and their preservation allowing for resource conservation as well as cultural and historic value.

She mentioned the opportunities to restore old buildings to their original grandeur and achieve efficiency while leaving their defining features intact. Several LEED programs can be applied for such buildings.

Mr. Anan detailed how old buildings can be maintained with new techniques for sustainable structures. He further delved into the embodied en-

ergy of a building (all the energy that goes into the construction and transport of material and people used to build a structure) which generally equals about one year's worth of operating energy.

He matched this idea with financial sustainability – that the costs will determine whether it makes more sense for buildings to be preserved and retrofitted or simply rebuilt completely.

After both presentations, the audience was free to ask questions of both speakers. One question dealt with how an architect would approach a situation like IIT's, which is striving for sustainability but partly constrained by historic Mies buildings – or the "Mies Police," as the question's author put it.

The answer that came out was that the architect should meet early with the preservation committee to work out their differences and reach a compromise. After all, some buildings no longer serve their intended purpose, regardless of their historical importance.

Another question pertained to how to manage or change older office buildings in any major metro area dealing with low occupancy. The consensus was that adaptive reuse, such as changing the purpose to mixed-use residential, may be a preferable strategy.

The high point, though, was over a question about how to integrate building energy code into historic buildings.

Ms. Stoner passionately supported maintaining the historic structures as is, noting that building codes make exceptions for historic structures.

Mr. Anan, though, responded smartly by saying that the technology exists to upgrade historic buildings without damaging their features, and that historic buildings should not be allowed to take this easy out when a more sustainable option now exists.

The forum proved interesting and informative from start to finish, with everyone leaving with a more informed perspective on the debate between historic preservation and energy efficiency. The next Sustainability Forum will be Friday November 18, 2011.

Overall, IIT's Sustainability Week had a little something for everyone, from the avid beach cleaner and farmer's market shopper to the green entrepreneur and sustainability-minded architect. But even though the festivities may be over for now, the work of creating a more sustainable world will go on.



Photo by Christina Noonan