It’s been a busy autumn season for Groundwork!

This month, our senior policy specialist Diane Conners hosted education leaders, elected officials, and local food and farm advocates at a local school to celebrate the establishment of a new state fund for local food in school cafeterias. We worked really hard to get that done. Now we are zeroed in on our goal to make it a permanent statewide fund so that kids across Michigan can have healthy, locally grown lunches in their school cafeterias.

Former Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell joined us here in Traverse City to outline steps that cities can take to reduce our impact on a changing climate. Under his leadership, Grand Rapids has become a national model for clean energy and sustainability programs. That event kickstarted a movement to power Traverse City and other communities in the region by 100 percent renewable energy.

Our local food and clean energy programs illustrate a core strategic principle of Groundwork that I want to take a quick minute to describe. Central to our approach is developing innovative and successful projects on the ground in our home region of northwest Michigan, leveraging them as replicable models to support other communities, and, when possible, to support better policy at the state level.

The new state fund for local food is a result of more than a decade of focused work with farmers, administrators, teachers, and food service staff in cafeterias and classrooms in schools in the Traverse City area. Meanwhile, our community-based promotion of solar power and energy efficiency has helped to form an influential network of local clean energy advocates who are speaking out for modernizing state energy policy as legislators debate Michigan’s energy future in Lansing.

This local-to-statewide model is working and we are committed to building it into all of our programs going forward.

I am also happy to report that Groundwork’s Harvest at The Commons event was a terrific success! 600 of our friends and supporters sat down together to enjoy a mouth-watering, local farm-to-table feast, bid on homemade pies, and dance the night away. It was a true community celebration, and I hope you’ll plan to return or come for the first time next year.

The sense of community that shined at our Harvest party reminded me that Groundwork is indeed a team effort. All that we’ve achieved and all the opportunity that lies ahead is made possible by our members. So, a special thanks to that group. And if you’re a volunteer or just follow our issues, thanks for being part of our community.

Enjoy the Michigan fall season!

Groundwork Executive Director

You’re making it happen
Mayors lead fight against climate change

Traverse City Mayor Jim Carruthers had a breakthrough moment on Oct. 6—the day Groundwork and our Traverse City energy partners invited former Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell to town to deliver a speech about the role the world’s mayors played at the breakthrough Paris Climate Summit last year. Grand Rapids’ innovative efforts to wean itself off fossil fuels, and how other cities should follow suit.

“We need to do a lot more,” said Carruthers, who’d like to see Traverse City also move toward a goal of using 100 percent renewable energy. “I had this ‘ah-hah’ moment at lunch (with Heartwell). I wasn’t thinking that the city could set its own goals, to reduce its reliance on energy, to reduce its water consumption. We do it in our homes, but we can do it on a city-wide level.”

In his effort to go green, Heartwell found willing partners in the academic and business communities, the nonprofit sphere and the faith community. In 2010 the U.S. Chamber of Commerce named Grand Rapids the most sustainable mid-sized city in the nation. GR aims to be 100 percent renewable by the year 2030. On Dec. 4, 2015, in Paris City Hall, Heartwell was among 600 mayors from around the world who convened to help their governments pass an ambitious climate accord.

“We have got to turn this problem around now,” Heartwell told Traverse City. “It’s easy to look at the magnitude of the problem before us and think that our contribution means nothing. But sustainability is not a game of solitaire. You need partners.”

“Paris shows us the way. It’s up to us to go there.”

Check out Jim Dulzo’s in-depth interview with Heartwell on Groundwork’s website, about how the former United Church of Christ pastor and businessman helped the once famous, fine-furniture manufacturing town take the leap toward sustainability just as it embraced new urbanism development, hip breweries, and a growing population of enthusiastic millennials.

Heartwell’s appearance at the event “Beyond Paris: International to Local Climate Solutions” was co-sponsored by Groundwork, Michigan Climate Action Network, TC350, Michigan Environmental Council, NMEAC, and more.

Scenes from Harvest at The Commons

Traverse City Mayor Jim Carruthers and former Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell.

Groundwork Board Member John Bercini makes a bid for a pie during the Harvest silent auction.

Executive Director Hans Voss introduced a new short film highlighting Groundwork projects.

Nearly 600 people showed up for an all-local feast prepared by Harvest Restaurant and the Great Lakes Culinary Institute.

The Crane Wives brought down the house (or tent) with a great set after the Harvest feast.

Other News from Groundwork

Feeding Michigan school children fresh, local produce

Groundwork celebrated the launch of the new Michigan 10 Cents a Meal for School Kids and Farms incentive program—inspired by a program that originated in the Grand Traverse region in a project coordinated by Groundwork senior policy specialist Diane Conners. The expanded program will provide schools in 16 districts in northwest and west Michigan with up to 10 cents per meal in matching funds to purchase and serve locally grown fruits and vegetables.

The unveiling happened at Traverse Heights Elementary School, where Conners joined a series of speakers who have made the program possible. After that, students gathered in the auditorium to participate in Michigan Apple Crunch day.

Chip Hoagland receives Milliken Distinguished Leadership Award

Groundwork honored Cherry Capital Foods owner and Groundwork board member Chip Hoagland with this year’s Milliken Leadership Award on Oct. 8. Hoagland, dubbed the “Warren Buffet of local food,” is a key instigator behind this region’s local food economy growing by leaps and bounds since he acquired the innovative food distribution company eight years ago.

Hoagland joins an esteemed list of previous Milliken Award winners that includes former U.S. Senator Carl Levin (2015); developer of the Village at Grand Traverse Commons, Ray Minervini (2014); U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow (2013); Black Star Farms co-founder Don Coe (2012); and Crystal Mountain Resort CEO Jim MacInnes (2011).

Groundwork staff changes

On Oct. 1, Jim Dulzo officially retired after 15 years of tireless service to the Groundwork mission. “Jimzo” has played many roles for Groundwork over the years, from shaping our message as our managing editor, to his unforgettable e-blasts, to being a leader in the successful campaign to prevent new coal plants in Michigan, to establishing himself as a key voice in Michigan’s clean energy debate. Dulzo is a force to be reckoned with, and no doubt leaves a lasting legacy. We wish “Jimzo” well in his retirement!

We’re thrilled to welcome Jacob Wheeler to the Groundwork staff as Communications Manager. Jacob grew up in Leelanau County and—after gallivanting across continents—returned to northern Michigan with his wife Sarah Eichberger three years ago. He edits and publishes the Glen Arbor Sun newspaper.

Jim Bruckbauer recently joined Groundwork’s leadership team as Deputy Director, where he now oversees finances, communications, and staff development.
Thank you to the following organizations who underwrote Groundwork's many programs, events, and activities over the last few years. These fine businesses, partners organizations, and corporations chose to sponsor or made a donation to Groundwork, and for that support we are especially grateful. Please read through the list, and be sure to shop and procure services locally from these great partners!
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