

The green movement is finally moving

The question for all these greenies was simple: have we reached a tipping point yet in the green movement?

And the answer was clear, as well: Maybe.

A couple of weeks ago, a lot of longtime greenies and some of the newly baptized held a love-in (the Association of Energy Conservation Professionals Green Living and Energy Expo) at the Roanoke Civic Center and this one was quite a bit different than the seven that preceded. It drew a crowd. A big, enthusiastic, knowledgeable crowd.

When Billy Weitzenfelder started this thing eight years ago at Virginia Tech, he had 13 exhibitors. This year there were 70 and Billy turned some away. It was noisy and busy, bustling with information and energy (which should have been harnessed).

That it was held in that garage of a new building at the civic center, a building without much of a green pedigree, was curious, but the building has plenty of room, in any case.

Back to the point, though. Billy thinks we're "very close" to a tipping point. Frank Early, who founded Sav-Elec, a lighting company with green



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Editor

financial planning firm with an environmental emphasis, was more reticent: "At this point, we're still marginal," he says, "but we're gaining momentum."

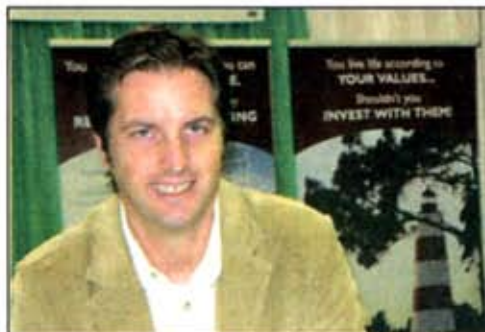
Pete, who writes an investment column for the Journal on occasion, says his own business—his assets under management is up 70 percent over a year ago, he says—has benefited by the recent interest in environmentalism. However, "there are still a lot of people who believe it's still easier to do business as usual."

He sees a political solution: "If politicians would implement tax policies for green building, we'd see change much quicker. Tax incentives that would make green investment equivalent in cost to what is standard now, would be great." Green, he says, "would be exceptional for the

edges, in 1976— waaaaay before the current green emphasis— agreed that we're "on the threshold." Pete Krull, who is president of Krull & Company, a



Dan Smith Photos



economy if we'll only plant the seeds."

Early has seen gradual growth in interest—and in his business—over the years. Today, his energy-efficient light bulbs and systems have become all the rage. They're so popular, in



Clockwise from top left: Billy Weitzenfelder, Frank Early, Pete Krull at the recent Green Living and Energy Expo in Roanoke

fact, that his small business is being threatened. The big-box stores (Wal-Mart, Lowe's, Home Depot) are offering the bulbs for less than he charges and people

are buying them up. He doesn't mind because he believes in the result.

"Money is still the primary reason people change," Early says. Tax incentives, he believes, could "be very important. We have them already, but not many people know about them. They're available for commercial buildings and you can take the tax savings off your tax bill. It's a direct savings."

Billy sees the construction industry leading the charge these days. "Last year," he says, "we had one EnergyStar or EarthCraft builder here. This year there are five and we had to turn others away." These are certified green builders, and their techniques have been adopted as a model for energy efficiency.

Architects, says Billy, "took the lead, but the builders were hard nuts to crack. When the myth of cost was finally dispelled, the builders wanted to get involved. And they have. With them come the suppliers" and the ripple begins.

Perhaps as interesting as anything else at the expo was the number of high school-age kids in attendance. "The exhibitors don't quite know how to react to the kids," says Billy. "They don't see them as immediate consumers, so they're reluctant to even talk to them." However, he says, "This is the future for us." That and the fact that the kids go home energized—so to speak—and talk to their parents about what they've seen.

That's how movements begin.



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