

Standing room only at cottagers' workshop

Posted By Craig Gilbert

There wasn't a chair to spare in the downstairs conference room at the Espanola Regional Recreation Complex Thursday night, July 22. About 40 cottagers representing a half-dozen cottagers' associations came out to hear a series of speakers at a workshop organized by the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA.)



A cottagers workshop was held in Espanola last week highlighting local waterways. Anne Labranche - Assistant, Eric Calder - Greater Sudbury Lake Water Quality Program Coordinator, Traci Logan - Program Coordinator with the Federation of Ontario Cottagers Associations, Anna deSellas - Inland Lakes Scientist at the MoE's Dorset Environmental Science Centre, Sarah Allen - Regional fire advisor for the MNR's east fire region. Missing: Laurentian University professor Dr. Charles Ramcharan who represented the Cooperative Freshwater Ecology Unit. Photo by Craig Gilbert

According to program coordinator, Traci Logan, who facilitated the event, the response was a surprise. Just 15 people pre-registered. Logan and others were fishing out chairs from the deepest reaches of the room, pulling out a few with caster wheels attached before they were through.

According to Bill Hickey, president of the West Panache Campers' Association, the event was "lovely."

He went to learn some things and to network.

"I was looking for information and I learned a lot of things," he said as he sampled the smorgasbord of free material laid out at the side of the room. "And I talked to a few people, networking is a big thing."

Another cottager who spoke on condition of anonymity seemed thrilled with what she learned. Originally from the Thunder Bay area, she and her husband said they escaped Toronto for the peace, quiet and wide-open spaces around Lang Lake about seven years ago.

"I didn't know there was calcium in trees!" she exclaimed. "And the information on forest fires was interesting - we're going to look at where we can clean up our property."

She said she was concerned about water quality as well, another subject covered at the workshop, adding she had never heard of FOCA before reading about the event.

"We just put in an up-to-date - and fairly expensive - septic system," she said. "We came because we care about where we are going to swim and what we are going to drink. My husband's an engineer and I have a degree; we love going out to these things."

FOCA provides representation and leadership to all cottage associations in Ontario, representing about 550 rural community groups and road associations, according to Logan. Cottagers can join the voluntary, non-profit organization as part of an existing association or as an individual.

FOCA promotes "sustainable waterfront communities by encouraging positive environmental stewardship, supporting strong community leadership," and through promoting fair and equitable public policy on topics such as fair taxation.

Logan said workshops like Thursday's are aimed at helping cottagers make pro-active decisions about their properties and the water bodies they inhabit.

"Unfortunately, we sometimes don't think about water quality until we can't swim in the lake or forest fires if there is a blaze headed for the cottage," she said.

The session included presentations from a Laurentian University professor representing the Cooperative Freshwater Ecology Unit (which is moving to a brand-new multi-million-dollar facility on Lake Ramsay opposite LU), a Ministry of the Environment scientist, a Ministry of Natural Resources fire expert and the coordinator of Greater Sudbury's lake water quality program.

Visit: www.foca.on.ca for more information.