

LONG ISLAND ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

# GREEN

GUIDE 2010



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By **Ambrose Clancy**

Who are the Long Islanders who have changed their lifestyles to a greener existence?

Although different in many ways, four Islanders we spoke to shared some nearly identical experiences. They began their quests motivated by a desire to save money. But somewhere in the middle of the process they continued because of idealism.

It also became a happily addictive progression with the conclusion that once in, they went all in, trying to lower their carbon footprint as much as possible.

## RUN BY THE SUN

Reducing his carbon footprint brought big changes to Mark Bartosik's life. But the soft-spoken British native never expected going green would bring the police to his door.

One evening the software engineer was at home on a quiet Bay Shore cul-de-sac when he heard a knock at the door. Looking out the window he saw two Suffolk County Police officers waiting.

Bartosik opened the door and politely asked, "Yes, officers, can I help you?"

One cop asked if he owned the house and when Bartosik said yes, his partner pointed skyward and asked, "Is that a solar roof?"

Bartosik allowed that it was, wondering what law he could have possibly broken by powering his house with sunshine.

The cops reassured him their visit was not professional but purely social since in their travels they'd never witnessed such an impressive

solar-paneled roof.

Bartosik gets that a lot.

On the front of the 1,900-square-foot farm-ranch with a rear dormer and extension are 250 solar electric tiles and on top of the dormer there are 24 more. On the rear are four electric laminates that are fitted by peeling them off paper and gluing them onto the plastic membrane of the roof.

"Rather like hanging wallpaper," Bartosik said.

Oh, and on the roof near the rear



**MARK BARTOSIK** near his thermal panel that heats the water in his house.

is a thermal panel which looks like a skylight and heats water for the house.

"I collect solar panels the way some people collect baseball cards," Bartosik said. "I've now run out of suitable roof space, so when I install another system it will be ground mounted."

Next up is to buy an electric car such as the GM Volt, which will further reduce his carbon footprint. "My filling station will be my house," he said.

That ubiquitous buzz phrase, "carbon footprint," means the amount of carbon dioxide – which contributes to global warming – released into the atmosphere from individual human activity. Lighting up your residence with electricity generated by burning coal or oil is one contributor to your footprint. But there are many other causes of carbon emissions we're responsible for, such as how and where we get the food we eat.

How many pounds of fossil fuel does it take to raise a steer, butcher it, process it, package it and eventually transport it so it becomes that cheeseburger set before you at the local diner?

It all becomes your carbon footprint.

Ask Bartosik about the financial commitment to going solar and he'll tell you he's taken advantage of all federal, state and county rebates, and that he's coming close to being off the electricity grid altogether. Soon his investment in solar technology will be all paid off.

"But that's not the point, is it?" he asked, noting that he's further reducing his contribution to emissions by gardening and harvesting his own vegetables.

His commitment to going green

even includes landscaping. All trees on his property bear fruit and the bushes produce berries.

"Anything planted on my place I want to eat," Bartosik said.

## STEP BY STEP

For Nancy Dillingham and her long-time partner, Janet Wright, it started 10 years ago with a simple idea to convert a back deck into a sunroom.

Now the handsome house on Shade Tree Lane in Aquebogue is a testament to the two women's successful strategy of driving their carbon footprints down drastically.

The light bulb going off over their head to go green was more like sun flooding though their new room. "We never realized how much sun we had until we built the room," Dillingham said.

Since then, they've converted the house to solar power and are contributing to LIPA's grid, which means the power company sends them annual payments.

One step led to another. Dillingham's pride and joy these days is an all-electric car – a Chrysler GEM (Global Electric Motorcar). "I was taking like a bazillion little trips around here and thought an electric car was the way to go," she said.

You can't just go onto a lot and kick a GEM's tires, so Dillingham was patient, going online to look for availability and bargains.

"I got one in Syracuse for \$500," she said proudly.

Next step? "We just got our rain barrel," Dillingham said.

Last summer the couple decided to capture nature's own irrigation for their plants and birdbaths by purchasing the 55-gallon barrel.

"We're looking forward to setting it up," she said.

## THE SHOCK OF THE NEW

Quogue's Deborah Shishido lived in Japan for seven years, returning home to Long Island in 2005. Going green wasn't much of a choice in Japan since the country is set up for people to live that way, she said. "There's much more done there to control carbon footprints than here," Shishido said.

She found that every home has up to 11 separate recycling containers, even one for the Styrofoam trays that grocers use to package meat and poultry.

When she subscribed to a daily paper in Japan her first delivery included a bag, and she was instructed to put papers in the bag when she was finished. Every month a man from the newspaper came and took away the bag and gave her a new one.

Shishido received some baffled responses when she tried to integrate what she'd experienced into a Long Island lifestyle. For instance, in Japan there are inexpensive devices that recycle bathwater to be used for washing clothes, what's called

### NANCY DILLINGHAM

drives an electric car and will soon water her plants with rainwater.



Bob Giglione



Bob Gagliano

“gray water” usage.

“When I asked people if they had something to convert gray water they looked at me as if I had two heads,” she said.

And it wasn’t just trying to save on water that had people scratching their heads. She took her car to have it inspected and then walked to a place for coffee. “The mechanic called me on my cell phone and said he couldn’t start my car,” she remembered.

She talked him through the simple drill of inserting the key and tuning it.

“Yeah, nothin’,” the mechanic said.

Shishido suddenly realized the problem.

“My car’s a hybrid and doesn’t make any noise when you start the ignition,” she said.

Shishido sees slow but steady progress here, especially with plastic grocery bags. When she first started bringing her own bag to the market she was looked at as an odd duck. “Some people at the checkout would growl at me, ‘Oh, here she is with her bag,’” she said.

But more and more people have

**DEBORAH SHISHIDO**

was used to life in Japan, where earth-friendly living is the norm.

joined her, and there’s “a lot less growling.”

But she still has to explain what a “smart strip” is – one place to plug in all your electric appliances so all can be shut down at once when not in use, to avoid drawing electricity.

“Even when a microwave or a TV is turned off, it’s using power,” she said.

Shishido is spreading the word in her neighborhood, forming a small network of like-minded people, but now she wants to take it another step.

“I want to branch out into the community so we can get laws changed,” she said. Most notably, for reducing the number of streetlights and making the essential ones burn efficient bulbs.

**THE RIGHT THING TO DO**

MarciaGrace Tropin is one of the few Long Islanders who got out the calculator and put a number to her and her husband Larry’s carbon footprint. The process involves figuring out how many tons of carbon dioxide you annually set loose into the atmosphere.

“Ours is 32 – still way too high – while the national average is 53,” Tropin said. She noted that the world average for carbon footprint is 11.

An interfaith minister in Sound Beach, Tropin said she started on her green journey, like most others, by trying to save some pennies. She learned frugality at her mother’s knee. “She came out of the Depression and saved absolutely everything,

and I do the same,” she said.

But somewhere in the middle of weather stripping all doors and windows, installing a wood-burning stove to augment her boiler and installing a programmable thermostat, the minister began to see there are three aspects of lightening one’s carbon footprint.

“There’s the savings, of course, and there’s the idea of living a healthier lifestyle, of having clean water and clean air,” the minister said. “But there’s also a spiritual concept at work. Life is not just about you. It’s about everyone who you share the planet with. If you care, you have to do the right thing.”

Her latest contribution is to consume a meatless diet for health and also because of the huge amount of energy expended in the meat-processing industry.

Is Larry on board with the meat ban?

“He has a burger now and then,” Tropin said. “But only now and then, and only one.”



Bob Gagliano

**MARCIAGRACE TROPIN**

is doing the right thing economically and spiritually, she said.