Rise Up for Climate Justice Campaign

by Lynda Schneekloth and Roger Cook

In the late afternoon on Sept. 24, 2015, over 300 people gathered in Niagara Square in downtown Buffalo, New York to initiate a three month campaign, RISE UP FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE. The campaign is designed to raise awareness of the upcoming UN Paris Climate Talks which we all know are critical to the future of our planet. As 4ACityPais says, “We are the first generation that is seeing the last effects of the climate crisis, but may be the last generation that has the chance to do anything about it.” Moreover, the title, “Climate Justice” builds on the message and language of Pope Francis and last year’s People’s Climate March.

The Sierra Club Niagara Group, with the support of the Interfaith Climate Justice Community, are asking ourselves: What specifically can we do in the Western New York Region? How do we get people involved? How can we encourage and support collective and individual action? This three-month campaign is designed to respond to these questions.

We have gathered a group of diverse partners for this campaign and they were evident in the rally. We are using for organizing is the CLIMATE JUSTICE PLEDGE. We are asking organizations, elected officials and individual to sign this pledge. The language outlines the core of the climate crisis and asks people:

- To call on President Obama to lead the world to a universal, legally binding agreement to cut greenhouse gas emissions with provisions to protect the poorest and most vulnerable and indigenous people.
- To meet with our elected officials and ask them to sign the pledge and to work on policy and legislation to move to renewables and to develop a just transition strategy for impacted communities.
- To take action at their own pace on this date which was selected in solidarity with Pope Francis’ address to the joint session of Congress.

The rally was a powerful statement by the thousands of individuals on behalf of the Earth and future generations.

At the rally there was an hour of creative festivities focused on climate justice such as an energetic crowd – dance, song, the U.S.S. Climate Justice moving boat, face painting, poetry readings by young people and information tables. The speakers included the range of partners: union brothers and sisters, with Deborah Hayes speaking for the Communications Workers of America; Sister Sharon Goodmote who spoke as a representative of Catholic Bishop Malone; Agnes Williams and drummers spoke on behalf of the Seneca and indigenous people; Maxine Murphy, from PUSH spoke about lack of affordability in the energy sector; Subhashi Raj about her country, Fiji, an island on the front lines of climate change and others. Already 20 unions or union leaders have signed the pledge as have elected officials including State Senators Marc Panepinto and Tim Kennedy, Paul Dyster, Mayor of Niagara Falls. The Western New York Environmental Alliance, representing over 100 organizations, is a partner as well as the Partnership for the Public Good, PUSH, the Working Families Party NYS, the League of Women Voters, Buffalo/Niagara and many others. And we have only begun.

We will be devoting a widening of partners committed to taking action on Climate Change. We will be offering programs and events for education, including solidarity with nation- al/international programs as possible; we will be visiting the offices of all of our elected officials to push for their climate action plans; we will provide support for everyone who wants to engage their organization, church or school in this campaign, we will all take what action is required to push their elected officials to move to a climate action plan.

This is our earth, and we will be demanding that everyone who works together for the sake of the only planet we have, to come together and work together to save the planet.

Rise Up for Climate Justice Campaign!

SEE IMPORTANT ELECTION BIOS AND BALLOTS ON PAGE 2!
Elections 2015: Time to Vote!

As a member of the Sierra Club, you are asked to participate in two elections this fall. The first is our Niagara Group election of members of the Executive Committee – see information in this Trailblazer. The other election is for members at Large for the Atlantic Chapter (New York State) of the Sierra Club. Information will be available in the next issue of Sierra Atlantic, and also on the website: http://atlant2-sierrachapter.org/
We ask for your considered participation!!!

Please read the following biographies of the candidates.

CHARLEY BOWMAN - graduated from SUNY Albany with a PhD in cell biology and has several years later moved to Western New York to work at SUNY Brockport. Dr. Bowman and his family in Albany gave us a useful going-away present: a snow shovel. Following years of basic research on cell membranes, I recall him as a Research Assistant Professor. Throughout those years, I co-authored 20 refereed publications, 25 invited papers, and guest-biblically for many years. Following retirement, my volunteerism increased at the WNY Peace Center as its Intern Coordinator. I am currently followed by my establishment of the Renewable Energy Task Force therein.

My interest in environmental issues is an extension of my human activities, as well as Rita Yelick’s wonderful work on WNY hydro-fracking issues, learning from her about the horrid connection between the intensity of water use not in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Niagara Falls Airport Reserve Station (NFARS) was again placed on the Pentagon’s base closing chopping block. As the largest employer in Niagara County, we needed to find a new peaceful vision for the air base and populous support to deal with the urgent problems of climate change area.

In May 2012, an epiphany occurred to me that the Niagara Falls Airport Reserve Station could become a gigantic smoke stack, and perhaps instead at this moment to learn the details of solar farming. These studies eventually led to an additional proposal for creating a solar farm on the 1,700 acres Lewisohn Reservoir. Additionally, why not consider NY State super- funds sites for solar farming? Love Canal—the mother of all such sites—could conceivably have a solar farm on top of that encapsulated mess. The proposition that if NY State consider- ed the large-scale use of solar to generate electric power at super funds areas, could we generate more than 50% of our energy needs, solar super-generation from superfund sites.

Moving forward, solar energy stuff is adding. My solar farm efforts eventually led to other interests and tasks such as the de-industrialized movement, opposing the Bakken oil “bunk” trains going through Upstate NY, and opposing the proposed natural gas in unstable salt caverns under the shores of pre-empting Lake Watauga Glen.

In summary, I reiterate what one Sierra Club Niagara Group member (unnamedly) said: “The enemy is not ISIS, it’s the CO2 and the atmosphere.” Neff. ‘Let’s get going!”

SARA SCHULTZ - Before I joined the Niagara Group Executive Committee in 2010, my activism was more on a personal level. I went to rallies and participated in clean-up efforts. I taught children, including my own, in camps, as a youth group advisor and at our Synagogue’s religious school about how we need to live in harmony with our environment. We have been on the “green teams” at all three of my places of employment. My lifestyle choices have focused on reducing single use plastics, including eating a plant-based diet, driving the first hybrid and now a plug-in, living in a green certified home with geo thermal energy and wind powered electricity, and paying close attention to the rules of reduced, re-use, recycle.

Getting active in the Sierra Club has opened up a wider range of opportunities to contribute. I am the secretary for the Niagara Group, I co-Chaired the tabling committee, write articles, speak at public meetings, assist with the organization of events, lobby our legislators, participate in bomb-train campaigns and manage our Meet-Up page. I have been on our State Delegate since January and I am eager to contribute to the Sierra Club on the state level.

I have been very active in my town with the “Anheister Against Fracking” group. Together with our small team, we have pushed very hard to ban fracking and frack waste in our municipalities. This resolution should be permanent legislation by this printing. Renewable energy, anti-fracking campaigns, campaign finance reform, educating people about industrial farming and the devastation it is causing to both animals and the environment, and pushing for our environmental education are the areas that I am most passionate about. Finally, my husband and I are hoping to train as SC cutting leaders next spring. We are both passionate about reducing the natural environment and viewing wildlife. We would like to share our love of this with others. I hope you will vote for me as a State Delegate to the Atlantic Chapter to help expand our activist movement. I am very eager to serve this critical cause of environmental justice with passion and conviction.

PAMELA HUGHES - Watching the world unfold in fits and starts only as part of my life with bikes through the woods, climbing trees, and walking through creeks, I certainly was a nature girl. All my life, my passion for protecting the environment has been with me. In memories of the many losses of animal species, habitats, and pristine waters, transforming with my earth’s territories into leveled forests, smog and acid rain, polluted waterways, human encroach- ment into nature preserves, and an exponentially growing human population, I joined the Sierra Club in 2010. My interest in planting trees and issues of forest clear-cutting prompted my later nomination as a State Delegate. I became directly involved with Niagara County Community College’s plans for a roadway through the green forest bordering their property. We successfully negotiated a plan to minimize the impact on the existing forest. I was then nominated to the Executive Committee in 2011 and later served as the Western New York Environmental Alliance Delegate, Newsletter Editor (2012 to present), and finally in 2013, assumed the role of Vice-Chair. Over the past four years, I have represented the Sierra Club Niagara Group at public hearings for hydrofracking and the expansion of Niagara County’s Chemical Waste Management facility, advocating in oppo- sition of both issues. As the former Vice Chair, I provided entailed assistance with Sierra’s operations, communications, and development of the “Rise Up For Climate Justice” campaign this fall. It has been my privilege to serve side by side the caliber of knowledgeable and com- mitted people in this group. My ongoing passion in protecting the environment in a range of roles and capaci- ties remains strong and I hope that my efforts will make a difference in my corner of the world.

RICHARD LIPPS - My background and accomplish- ments may be summarized by the following description: As an Environmental Lawyer, I have handled many noteworthy cases, including Love Canal and as special environmental counsel for the plaintiffs in Three Mile Island disaster. As one of the original Executive Committee members in the Niagara Group over the last 44 years, I have also served twice as Chair over an 8 year period, been a member of Atlantic Chapter Executive Committee at various times, and the Chairperson of Chapter Executive Committee from 1976-1982. In addition, I was for- merly the Northeast Region Vice President of the Sierra Club, Founder of National Club Hazardous Materials Committee, and have been retained as the Sierra Club Chapter legal advisor for the past 42 years.

Other ongoing activities include retention as general counsel for many local environmental organizations, including Buffalo Niagara Riverkeeper, and Atlantic States Legal Foundation. I am co-founder of the American Clean Water Project and currently developing the legal issues of people whose water has been contaminated by hydro-fracking. As an active member of the anti-fracking movement, I am committed to continue legal action against the consequent results of hydro-fracking well into the future.

LARRY SNIDER - Over the last decade, it has become increasingly clear to me that the earth needs some good advoca- tes. In today’s world, there is really a life issue, and I wanted to make a difference in the world. The Sierra Club is one of the best environmental organizations and vastly knowledgeable in how to protect and advocate for the environ- ment on a real and practical level.

Before becoming involved with the Sierra Club, I also par- ticipated in my local Church’s Diocesan wide (regional) commit- tee called the Buffalo Diocese Care for Creation Committee. This committee is focused on environmental education and advocacy, and I was directly involved in creating and producing a weekly newsletter called “God’s Green Earth.” From there, my interest in expanding my activism.

As a licensed CPA in NYS, I am proud to have served with the Niagara Group such a committed group of people, as the Treasurer for the Niagara Group over this past four-year term. Previously employed with NYS Department of Taxation and Finance for over 21 years of experience, I have the knowledge and experience to present new ideas and methods of utilizing our limited funds and have ensured that we have been good stewards of the monies at our disposal. I am especially proud of our Executive Board in raising funds for the Niagara group’s purpose. As an Executive Committee mem- ber, I have also participated in the last three rallies sponsored by the Niagara group, including Washington DC in 2013, New York City in 2014, and the recent buffalo Rally this past September. Building more awareness and activism in the WNY region is so very important in accomplishing our goals of defending our planet and addressing climate change. It would be an honor to continue my service for another term on the Executive Committee of the Niagara Group.

ROGER COOK - My interest in the environmental movement began with the Love Canal relocation effort where I helped organize the religious community (Ecumenical Task Force) toward advocating for relocation of the residents. Subsequently, the Ecumenical Task Force helped form the NYS Labo- r-Environmental Network, a coalition of labor unions and grassroots environmental groups based in com- munities around NYS impacted by toxic waste dumps. Also, at this time, I became director of the Western New York Council COHSH where we were able to engage workers in the fight for safer workplaces. In the early 1980s, I joined the national OSHA-Environmental Network (co-chaired by the AFL-CIO and the Sierra Club), locally WNVCOSH worked with the then state Senator gretchen Cuddyer and the then County Supervisor to establish the Clean Air Act, which was under assault by the Reagan Administrations.

My years of environmental/workplace safety and health activism has spanned from 1978 to the present 2015. My main interest is in building coalitions among labor and envi- ronmental/community activists to protect the environment, including the workplace environment. When workers are suc- cessful in eliminating unsafe chemicals in the workplace, both the environment and community benefit. Today, climate change and the loss of ecosystems and sea-level rise are very important in the “green economy” because it can bring jobs in the manufacturing and installation of renewable ener- gy, and the remaking of homes. Having served on Executive Committee of the Niagara Group I would like to continue my partnership work between labor, environmental, and commu- nity activism, forming systemic alliances that will ultimately strengthen our ability to achieve our common goals.

For more information or to vote online, please visit: http://sierrachapter.org.

NIAGARA GROUP OFFICIAL BALLOTS

BALLOT 1
BOARD OF GOVERNANCE AT-LARGE DELEGATES
CHOOSE UP TO 6 BOARD MEMBERS
☐ Charley Bowman
☐ Sara Schultz
☐ Pamela Hughes
☐ Richard Lippens
☐ Larry Snider
☐ Roger Cook

BALLOT 2
BOARD OF GOVERNANCE AT-LARGE DELEGATES
CHOOSE UP TO 6 BOARD MEMBERS
☐ Charley Bowman
☐ Sara Schultz
☐ Pamela Hughes
☐ Richard Lippens
☐ Larry Snider
☐ Roger Cook

Election Instructions:

To be eligible to vote, you must be a member in good standing with the Niagara Group as verified by a member card. All ballots must remain unopened until the box next to the ‘candidates’ names on the ballot. Each member may complete one ballot. Joint members may complete two ballots. Please detach this page and mail your ballot(s) to the address below in an ordinary letter-size envelope with proper postage. Send your ballots to:

2015 Niagara Group Elections Committee
Sierra Club Niagara Group • P.O. Box 1127 • Williamsville, NY 14221-1127

*Balloots must be received on or before 12/25/2015*