

~ SPLASH ~

Sustainable Practices Leave A Sustainable Heritage

Information Kit

March 2009



SPLASH encourages the City of Kingston and Downtown Kingston! to promote sustainable, participatory events that respect and celebrate the natural resources in our community.

Contents

1. What is SPLASH?	Page 3
2. Who are its members?	Page 3
3. What is the Poker Run?	Page 4
4. What are the perceived benefits of the Poker Run?.....	Page 5
5. Why does SPLASH want to replace the Poker Run?	Page 6
6. How are the City of Kingston & Downtown Kingston involved?.....	Page 6
7. How did Downtown Kingston react to your concerns?.....	Page 7
8. What alternatives has SPLASH proposed?.....	Page 7
9. Frequently asked questions	Page 8
10. Appendices:	
a) Alternative Event Summaries	Page 10
b) Information About Noise Pollution	Page 14

1. What is SPLASH?

SPLASH is a diverse group of Kingston residents who want a bright and sustainable future for Kingston. Each of its members felt that they could no longer stand by while the Poker Run used Kingston as a base of operations. Their goal is not to vilify this event, but to persuade City Council and Downtown Kingston to support the planning and execution of an alternate event to the Poker Run, one that is truly sustainable in regard to culture, society, the environment and the economy.

To date we have presented a display in Market Square, organized a successful postcard mailing to City Hall (easily soliciting signatures from the public), written to city councilors expressing our concerns, held a constructive meeting with Downtown Kingston and drafted numerous alternative event options.

What is SPLASH's ultimate goal?

Our ultimate goal is to encourage the City of Kingston and Downtown Kingston to promote sustainable, participatory events that respect and celebrate the natural resources in our community. We do not consider events like the Poker Run to be compatible with this vision.

2. Who are its members?

While you might think that SPLASH is made up of hard-core, granola-eating party-poopers, you could be surprised by the types of people who are involved in this social and environmental campaign. This group of concerned citizens includes:

- A lifelong Kingstonian, who is a massage therapist, environmentalist, member of the Faith and Justice Coalition, and member of the Board of Kingston Community Chaplaincy
- A mother of two who works in the social service sector, first time environmental activist, who felt pushed to the limit of her endurance by the Poker Run
- An artist who is also an ardent social activist and member of the Board of the Social Planning Council
- Retirees who are involved in the Faith and Justice Coalition, and social activists to boot
- Another first-time environmentalist, employed as an engineer, who enjoys cycling, canoeing, running, and the outdoors in general
- An author and social activist, member of the Peace and Justice Committee as well as the Kingston Community Roundtable on Poverty Reduction

3. What is a Poker Run?

According to Wikipedia:

“A **Poker run** (also known as a Poker Derby), is an organized event using a motorcycle, boat, car or other form of transportation where participants travel over a predesignated route and, at designated stops on the route, draw playing card(s). The object is to have the best poker hand at the end of the run. Prizes (usually cash prizes) are awarded for the best hand; some runs will award smaller awards for lower hands. Poker runs usually require a fee to enter; part of the fee goes to funding the event (including the prizes), while the rest goes to the event's cause (usually a charity of some sort). Specific rules and details vary, depending on the event. Moreover, each participant will be responsible to maintain the integrity of their cards during the run.”

According to virtualkingston.ca:

“Power boating between Kingston and Prescott, the 1000 Islands Poker run is the largest international poker run with more than 50,000 spectators and attracting performance boaters from all over the United States and Canada.



The concept of the race is for the boats to navigate the charted course, stopping at five checkpoints along the route. At each checkpoint, they pick up a sealed envelope containing a single playing card.

At the final checkpoint, the envelopes are opened and the crew holding the best poker hand is declared the winner!”

According to 1000islandsinfo.com:

“A Poker Run is not a race, it is a game of chance and a (sic) assembly of some of the hottest, fastest and exotic boats in North America! The public gather with wide-eyed, love-struck thoughts like children over these super-fast water vessels. A Poker Run is fun on the water with power to burn.”



4. What are the perceived benefits of the Poker Run?

Poker Runs are perceived by some as a fun and harmless event. The general public can come and see very glamorous, fast boats, up close, or on the water.

According to Downtown Kingston and anyone associated with the Poker Run, this event brings tens of thousands of people into the downtown core. Undoubtedly some people do come downtown to see this event, and certainly many out-of-town boaters and their crews/entourages stay in Kingston over the weekend. Having said that, this event is on a peak summer weekend, so to state that all those people are there as a direct result of the Poker Run is quite debatable.

There is no doubt that the Poker Run brings money to Kingston. In an article in the Whig Standard in 2007, President of Poker Runs America, Bill Taylor noted that, “Some drivers spend up to \$20,000 a weekend paying for their crew’s travel and accommodations, not to mention the thousands of dollars worth of fuel their boats consume.”

Poker Runs sometimes raise funds for charities. In 2008, there was a booth in Confederation Basin to raise public awareness and funds for Easter Seals.

The big question is who does this event really benefit, and at what costs, both socially and economically?



5. Why does SPLASH want to replace the Poker Run?

- This event has a significant environmental cost. Poker Run emissions could accumulate to an entire year's worth of Kingston's vehicle idling emissions in just 16 hours. Therefore, while initiatives such as our city's idling bylaw reduce overall emissions, the Poker Run must be considered among significant contributors to emissions, due to its large impact. (Review welcomed and details available upon request)
- The wakes of these speeding boats could harm sensitive vegetation along the waterfront, and increase erosion by the huge waves.
- Anyone who has ever been near one of these boats will attest to the noise pollution they cause. Please see page 14 for additional information on this lesser-known, but equally important, form of pollution.

This event has equally significant social costs:

- Because participating in this event requires access to wealth, promoting and celebrating it sends a message that the wealthy should be allowed certain extra privileges such as ability to exploit natural resources and exemption to city bylaws.
- It is an example to our children that over-consumption is acceptable. We should be providing healthier role models for our children as they are the leaders of the future.



6. How are the City of Kingston and Downtown Kingston involved in the Poker Run?

At present, Downtown Kingston! (DK) takes responsibility only for on-shore activities like the hot rod and vintage car displays, the sponsor booths, the Queen's solar car display, the boater safety booth, and in 2008, the museum display in City Hall. They also ran a hay ride between City Hall and the Marine Museum to encourage more visitors to take in that site. DK promotes the event, just as it would any other that brings people to the downtown core. The only real expense for DK, relating to the Poker Run, stems from a small local ad campaign (\$5,000 to \$7,000), telling people when and where they can see the boats.

The City of Kingston participates in the event only to the extent that they block off Ontario Street, and allow the Poker Run and DK to use Confederation Basin. In terms of noise by-law exemptions, Angela Patterson, a City by-law enforcement officer informed us that: "Cultural, recreational, educational and political events in parks and other public places that have been authorized by the City are exempt under the noise control by-law, however noise resulting from activities can be governed by the lease that is entered into between the lessee and the City." (Copies of the 12-page information sheet supplied by Ms. Patterson will happily be forwarded to you if you would like a copy.)

7. How did Downtown Kingston react to your concerns?

Three SPLASH members met with Doug Ritchie, the Managing Director of Downtown Kingston (a business association for downtown merchants), to present our concerns and offer suggestions for alternative events. Mr. Ritchie was very congenial and explained many facets of the workings of Downtown Kingston and its relationship to the Poker Run.

In the end, Mr. Ritchie stated that the role of Downtown Kingston is to promote events that will draw people into the downtown core. They are not in a position to judge what events should be promoted or not supported.

It is interesting to note that the only references to “the environment” in the Strategic Plan for Downtown Kingston (last revised in November 2001) relate to cosmetic issues, and not sustainability. There are also no references to any social justice issues. While this may be in keeping with the Municipal Act of the Province of Ontario, does it reflect the concerns and needs of residents of Kingston?

8. What alternatives has SPLASH proposed?

According to Doug Ritchie, Manager of Downtown Kingston, the Poker Run provides Downtown Kingston with a practically ready-made event that does not require significant effort on the part of his office. While Downtown Kingston does spend a small amount of money to promote this event, they do not have to do much else. SPLASH has suggested four alternative events to Mr. Ritchie: a festival celebrating non-motorized water activities and the beauty of Kingston’s waterfront; a pirate-theme festival, much like the one held in Alexandria Bay around the same weekend; an eco-Irish festival, showcasing Kingston’s Irish heritage and environmental practices; and a Kingston homecoming festival, similar to Gala Day on Toronto Island.

Complete descriptions of each event can be found on pages 10-13.



9. Questions We Assume Will Be Frequently Asked...

a) What activities have you engaged in to-date?

To date we have: presented a display in Market Square; organized a successful postcard mailing to City Hall (easily soliciting signatures from the public); written to our M.P., M.P.P., the Mayor and city councilors expressing our concerns; held a constructive meeting with Downtown Kingston; drafted numerous alternative event options; written to sponsors of the Poker Run to alert them to our concerns and solicited support from other environmental and water-based groups.

b) Why is the Poker Run so important to you? Why not protest something else? What's the big deal?

This event sets the tone for our community on many levels:

- It is an example of extravagant use of resources that trivializes genuine efforts at conservation such as Kingston's Idling Bylaw and local business' efforts such as the Green Protocol. (Green Protocol is a group of public/private enterprises who have agreed to follow a list of sustainability principles that will determine how they do business, by using recycled materials, investing in sustainable companies, efficient energy and natural resource use, and more.)
- Because participating in this event requires access to wealth, promoting and celebrating it sends a message that the wealthy should be allowed certain extra privileges such as ability to exploit natural resources and exemption to city bylaws.
- Unlike other uses of fuel and waterways, the Poker Run has no necessary function of its own, and participation is exclusive.
- It is an example to our children that over-consumption is acceptable. We should be providing healthier role models for our children as they are the leaders of the future.
- It is contradictory to Kingston's goal to become the most sustainable city in Canada.
- SPLASH applauds our city's endorsement of Focus Kingston's vision to make Kingston Canada's most sustainable city and we are convinced that the Poker Run conflicts with this vision.

c) What about the money/tourism that this event brings?

It is facetious reasoning to say that the income and tourism in Kingston that weekend is a direct result of the Poker Run. While undoubtedly some visitors do come because of the Poker Run, it is held on a peak summer weekend, which could be why there are so many tourists in town. In fact many people we met during our campaign this summer were in Kingston as tourists from other parts of Canada or overseas and were really put off by the event. They were happy to send a postcard to City Hall.

There is a cultural shift toward "greener" lifestyles- this will be reflected in people's entertainment choices. We can give the public options that they can feel good about.

Local tourism is increasing with the current economic situation, and by providing events that encourage local tourism and community involvement we ensure a stable local economy, not dependent on past trends, transient tourists and unpredictable outside dollars.

d) What if the Poker Run opts for some sort of carbon offset arrangement?

SPLASH members feel that carbon offsets are nothing but a license to pollute. They offer an illusion of buying time that we don't have. One group member compares them to the indulgences that used to be sold by the church to absolve people of their sins.

e) It's only a few hours a year, so chill out!

That's not the point. This event spectacularly displays many negative values, social and environmental, that should not be endorsed or supported by our community.

f) The boats are as efficient as they can be.

They may be as efficient as boats of that nature could possibly be. However, we have done preliminary calculations, and have asked the City to verify our work. By our calculations, Poker Run emissions could accumulate to an entire year's worth of Kingston vehicle idling emissions in just 16 hours. (Review welcomed and details available upon request).

g) How can you deny 50,000 spectators this small and free enjoyment?

We suggest offering alternative free events that promote healthier and more sustainable (but still fun) choices.

h) What about the other boats in the Thousand Islands? Will your next goal be to stop the cruise boat industry?

While in an ideal world, people would use motorized vehicles only when really necessary, we recognize that people have to live! At least cruise boats benefit people from most walks of life, as opposed to the Poker Run boats which are driven primarily by individuals with a great deal of money.

i) No one has ever complained before.

For at least the last three years, there have been letters to the editor in the Kingston Whig Standard complaining about this event. The weekend of the 2008 Poker Run, there was a protest display in Market Square, and many people showed their support. People's awareness of the environment is increasing, and complaints will be increasing.

j) The Poker Run can go somewhere else!

This is a tough one, because Kingston's City Council is forever being accused of driving potentially profitable ventures away (the Thousand Islands Charity Casino, Lowe's). In this case, however, we are suggesting alternative events that could actually increase the number of people visiting Kingston, and that would also engage and involve more residents. We see this as a win-win situation.



On the Waterfront *An all-natural celebration of the best Kingston has to offer*

Event summary:

We live in exciting times, where things are changing so rapidly, and people are becoming increasingly aware of the impact they have on their environment. *On the Waterfront* will provide a weekend of events for individuals, couples and families where they can participate in healthy, sustainable activities and have a great time.

During the day, folks can learn about and take part in non-motorized water-sports at sites from the rowing club in the East to Collins Bay Marina in the West. They can wander through Confederation Basin and view environmentally sound products, and sample natural foods. They can experience fresh local produce at downtown restaurants. In the evening, they can go to an outdoor concert one evening, and view sports adventure films the next.

Showcasing the very best Kingston has to offer, a fantastic waterfront venue, unlimited talent, fresh foods and environmental expertise, *On the Waterfront* could be a model for other communities to adopt. We could show Canada that in addition to being the freshwater sailing capital of the world, we are also the eco-boating capital.

Event Elements:

- Non-motorized water-sport workshops, clinics and demonstrations/races (sailing, windsurfing, canoeing, kayaking, kiteboarding) all along the waterfront
- Presentation of sports demonstration movies in the Market Square (similar to the Banff Mountain Film Festival, but for water-sports)
- Evening concert in Market Square featuring local artists whose primary interests are entertaining, but who are also concerned about the environment (Gord Downie is a Trustee of the Lake Ontario Waterkeepers, Sarah Harmer is a well-known environmental activist)
- Have a slow food or natural food festival
- Downtown restaurants featuring specials that incorporate local produce
- Block traffic on Sunday on a section of the lower downtown and hold a bicycle or foot poker run to the businesses in that area
- Have booths in Confederation Basin where vendors can display and sell environmentally conscious products
- Using smaller pieces of cast-off wood from a lumber yard, there could be a model boat building contest for kids, using the fountain in Confederation Basin as the testing pool
- Eco-Friendly boat companies could set up displays on Ontario Street in front of City Hall
- People with festival wrist-bands get in to all Kingston museums at a reduced rate



Wearing O' the Green Festival *The World's First Eco-Irish Celebration*



Event summary:

While many people might think of Kingston as a Loyalist city, it is also a hotbed of Irish pride. We have almost as many monuments to the Irish who passed away through various tragedies as we do to fallen war heroes. Kingston is also rapidly becoming one of Canada's greenest cities, so what better way to have a great party than to mix two different shades of green, and hold the world's first environmental (but still lots of fun) Irish celebration? The ***Wearing O' the Green Festival*** will provide a weekend of events for individuals, couples and families where they can participate in fun, Irish and environmental-themed activities and have a great time.

During the day, folks can learn about Kingston's rich Irish heritage, and the latest trends in green living, and take part in fun and exciting events, highlighting the best of both Irish and environmental cultures. They can wander through Confederation Basin and view both environmentally sound and Irish products, and sample natural and Irish foods. They can experience fresh local produce at downtown restaurants. In the evening, they can go to an outdoor concert one evening, and view classic Irish films the next.

Showcasing the very best Kingston has to offer, a fantastic waterfront and downtown, Irish talent and pride, fresh foods and environmental expertise, ***Wearing O' The Green*** could become a model for other communities. We could show Canada and the world how to have a great big party, and keep it green!

Event Elements:

- A Red-Green d.i.y. currach (Irish boat) building contest, for adult contestants willing to test their skills with cardboard and duct tape
- Using smaller pieces of cast-off wood from a lumber yard, there could be a model boat building contest for kids, using the fountain in Confederation Basin as the testing pool
- Presentation of classic Irish films in the Market Square (e.g. *Into the West*, *The Secret of Roan Inish*, *The Commitments*)
- Evening concert in Market Square featuring Irish-theme artists
- Have a slow food or natural food festival and/or an Irish food festival
- Downtown restaurants featuring specials that incorporate local produce and/or Irish specials
- Downtown stores could have Shamrock Sales, where green-ticketed items would be discounted. They could also highlight any environmental products they have.
- Have performances and demonstrations of Irish dancing and music in Confederation Basin, perhaps including opportunities for audience members who wanted to try some activities out
- Have booths in Confederation Basin where vendors can display and sell environmentally conscious products and Irish products
- People with festival wrist-bands get in to all Kingston museums at a reduced rate
- A parade down Princess Street, led by St. Patrick (walking), including things like the Queen's Solar Car, any environmental vehicles businesses or individuals wanted included, Irish dancers, and Irish groups, people dressed in green
- Irish costume contest where prizes will be awarded for things like Most Outrageous Costume, Most Authentic-looking Irish Man (Modern), Most Authentic-looking Irish Woman (Traditional), and more
- Irish games/activities in Douglas Fluhrer Park or Skeleton Park
- Guided Irish walkabout, highlighting sites of interest in Kingston's Irish community

Scavenger Days

A festival for the swashbuckler in all of us

Event summary:

What do you get when you combine a waterfront city steeped in history with a lake that is teeming with shipwrecks? The perfect venue for *Scavenger Days*, a Pirate Festival chock full of great events for swashbucklers and scalawags of all ages!



During the day, folks can learn about Kingston's maritime history, be entertained by pirate-themed street performers, take part in a workshop/demonstration of a pirate-themed activity, shop for treasures/bargains at local merchants, or just wander around taking in the sites and sounds of our amazing downtown, decorated for this great weekend. At night they can enjoy pirate-themed foods at local restaurants, or head to Market Square for an evening of movies or buccaneer fun.

Pirate festivals have been gaining in both popularity and number over the last few years (for more information, visit www.piratefestivals.com), and it would be possible to piggy-back our weekend with ones nearby to capitalize on swashbuckling resources. Alexandria Bay itself has *Bill Johnston's Pirate Days*, in August (August 8-17 in 2008).

Event Elements:

- Demonstrations and workshops in swordplay and fencing, sailing on sloops and schooners, slow food and local food preparation, jewelry making
- Building on the "scavenger" theme, there could be contests that encourage people to use recyclable materials to create new items, giving an environmental boost to the festival.
- A Red-Green Boat Building contest, where contestants build boats out of cardboard and duct tape (modeled after the Odessa Fair contest)
- Evening presentation in Market Square of *Muppet Treasure Island* (early show), and *Pirates of the Carribean* for late night revelers
- Evening presentation in Market Square of pirate-themed entertainers (could either be folks who specialize in this - and there are many - or folks who adapt their shows). Roger James was born to host this evening.
- Scavenger hunts for treasures: there could be adult and child versions of this, with varying levels of difficulty and, of course, prizes. This could be linked to tourist sites, or merchants, or both.
- Downtown merchants could have Swashbuckler Sales where sale items could be tagged with skull and cross-bones, or another pirate-themed icon.
- Costume contests for different age groups
- Pirate craft booths for kids and adults in Confederation Basin.
- Rum tasting and beer tasting events, in hotels or restaurants (Sponsorship potential from Schooner Beer or Bacardi Rum)
- Special presentations about Kingston's maritime heritage in Memorial Hall (like in the summer of 2008)
- A pirate parade the length of Ontario Street Saturday morning, from lower City Park to City Hall
- A pirate regatta bed race down Princess Street Sunday morning
- Funds could be raised through this weekend for a community project or agency



Welcome Home Weekend

A time to remember your past, and create new memories as well

Event summary:

All too often, when we grow up, we can't wait to leave home. There are new worlds to discover and new adventures to be had. Once you've been away for awhile, however, you realize how amazing your hometown is. Given what an incredible community Kingston is, that sense is undoubtedly higher in our expatriates. *Welcome Home Weekend* is a time for folks to come back and enjoy all the great things about their city, and maybe bring along friends to learn about it too.

This weekend would be a time to showcase all the very best Kingston has to offer. All entertainers, food and events would be local. It would also be a time to bring back and give something to the place you called home.

Event Elements:

- Friday evening picnics in all city parks. Neighbourhoods would be encouraged to have pot luck gatherings between 5:30 and 8 p.m., with extra food for visitors. There would be a free barbecue/picnic in Confederation Basin for unattached guests in the City.
- Evening presentation in Market Square of locally made films and videos, selected by the Kingston Canadian Film Festival.
- Evening concert in Market Square of great local bands, and g-rated comics.
- Local artists could have a show in Confederation Basin
- Local authors and poets could read in Boucher Park
- Downtown merchants could have Welcome Home sales
- Craft booths for kids and adults in Boucher Park
- Local food festival in Market Square
- Prizes for the person who has come from the farthest away; the person who has brought the most people back with them for the weekend; and more.
- There could be an element of giving back to the City through this weekend, where smaller community improvement projects could be proposed ahead of time and worked on by returnees. This could be coordinated by the United Way, using a model similar to their Day of Caring program, supplemented by community volunteers. Projects could range from creating a new flower bed in a park, to digging a community garden, to painting a fence at Bellevue House, to cleaning up a waterfront park... Through this, visitors would feel like they had invested in "their" community and feel more a part of it, even though they don't live here any more.



Information from Noise Pollution Clearinghouse

Noise Pollution Clearinghouse has some interesting things to say about this lesser known form of pollution : “The word "noise" is derived from the Latin word "nausea," meaning seasickness. Noise is among the most pervasive pollutants today. Noise from road traffic, jet planes, jet skis, garbage trucks, construction equipment, manufacturing processes, lawn mowers, leaf blowers, and boom boxes, to name a few, are among the audible litter that are routinely broadcast into the air.

Noise negatively affects human health and well-being. Problems related to noise include hearing loss, stress, high blood pressure, sleep loss, distraction and lost productivity, and a general reduction in the quality of life and opportunities for tranquility.

We experience noise in a number of ways. On some occasions, we can be both the cause and the victim of noise, such as when we are operating noisy appliances or equipment. There are also instances when we experience noise generated by others just as people experience second-hand smoke. While in both instances, noises are equally damaging, second-hand noise is more troubling because it has negative impacts on us but is put into the environment by others, without our consent.

The air into which second-hand noise is emitted and on which it travels is a “commons,” a public good. It belongs to no one person or group, but to everyone. People, businesses, and organizations, therefore, do not have unlimited rights to broadcast noise as they please, as if the effects of noise were limited only to their private property. On the contrary, they have an obligation to use the commons in ways that are compatible with or do not detract from other uses.

People, businesses, and organizations that disregard the obligation to not interfere with others' use and enjoyment of the commons by producing noise pollution are, in many ways, acting like a bully in a school yard. Although perhaps unknowingly, they nevertheless disregard the rights of others and claim for themselves rights that are not theirs.”

(<http://noisepollution.org/aboutno.htm>)

