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Northampton Earth Day event shares eco-friendly practices

NORTHAMPTON - Area residents seeking tips and advice on how to live a more "green" lifestyle descended on Pulaski Park Sunday afternoon for the city's first celebration in several years of the four-decade-old Earth Day.

By MATT ROCHELEAU
Gazette Contributing Writer

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The Northampton event was one of several with a similar theme held around the Pioneer Valley over the weekend.

Local eco-friendly groups and businesses arranged tents to promote and educate attendees on various environmentally sustainable practices such as getting around by bicycle, public transportation or hybrid vehicles, raising backyard chickens, using energy-efficient lighting and appliances, and composting and gardening for urban dwellers.

Valley Time Trade, which established a local network in January, recruited new members interested in offering services to others in the community to earn credit for the time they've invested to be used toward services from other members.

For instance, a member who walks another time trader's dog for 30 minutes can later receive 30 minutes of assistance from others in the group.

"People here though it was a cool idea, and I think (the Pioneer Valley) is the kind of place where it can really take off," said Northampton resident and trade member Emily Wergin, 29. More than 700 area residents have joined the organization in its first four months.

Huddled around a pair of chickens, others learned that raising the egg-laying birds is not just something for those who live on a farm or in a rural area.

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KEVIN GUTTING

April Grabowski, 5, of Indian Orchard admires two hens, Penelope, left, a three-year-old Buff Orpington, and Gladys, a Rhode Island Red less than a year old, during the Eco-Fair and Family Funfest held in Pulaski Park on Sunday. The pair are two of the three fowl that Meg Taylor of the Pioneer Valley Backyard Chicken Association brought to the event.

Kathy Eslea of Northampton, who has raised four chickens for the past two years in the backyard of her home, said the practice is relatively low-maintenance and benefits include the production of over a dozen eggs each week per chicken, natural pest and grub control and free fertilizer.

What's best, she said, is that "the eggs are much tastier than the store-bought ones," and more nutritious.

Those looking for a way to travel with less dependence on fossil fuels stopped by a booth explaining the pluses of adding a special battery pack to hybrid cars, like the 2005 Toyota Prius on display, that

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allows the vehicles to run solely on electric power for a longer duration.

"We're hoping people see that electric cars are really within their grasp," said Bill Farkas, 59, of Florence and president of the Pioneer Valley Electric Auto Association. "I think when people see the Prius they realize this is not some new-fangled technology for the future. It's here and now."

Sunday's gloomy skies did not give way to rain at the outdoor "Eco-Fair and Family Funfest," which sought to teach people to live well while consuming less energy, and thus slow climate change.

Minuet Fusto, 42, of Greenfield, and her 7-year-old daughter, Angelina, enjoyed the family-friendly atmosphere and received tips on composting.

"This is awesome. We came here to see if we could get suggestions for an issue we've been having with our composting," and found the help they were looking for, said the elder Fusto.

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