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**LATE
WEEK**

SINCE 1786

THE PRINCETON PACKET

SOLUTIONS

Huck Fairman

Breakfasts serving great ideas

From February through May this year Sustainable Princeton and the Princeton Public Library have been hosting monthly breakfasts in the library's Community Room for the purpose of bringing great, sustainable ideas to our town. And there has been no shortage of ideas. Water will be the focus of the final breakfast in May.

This month the subject was dealing with our waste, to save our environment, save money, and even make money. Most of us recognize that our consuming life styles have long produced too much waste, which has become environmentally problematic and expensive to deal with. One estimate mentioned at the breakfast was that each of us uses approximately 500 plastic bags per year, and it's hard not to notice them decorating our streets, roadsides and oceans, even as we've encouraged most to retire in perpetuity in our nearly filled landfills. To deal with this problem Sustainable Princeton asks us all to apply the four Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle and Re-imagine.

But first, on a national scale, one observer has been thinking about these environmental and economic challenges. Born in Illinois and holding both a BS in mechanical engineering and an MBA, Jigar Shah recently spoke at Princeton University about the ideas in his book, *Creating Climate Wealth*. Among his observations, insights, and recommendations are the following: "With rising commodity costs, water shortages, and global warming, the world market potential for these investments (what he calls 'impact investments') is enormous."

And, "We must identify and invest in the businesses that can unlock the \$10 trillion necessary to solve climate change." Following his own recommendation, he started the solar services company, SunEdison.

Embracing some of these ideas, a number of neighbors have envisioned and put into practice new ways of dealing with the issue of waste, and Sustainable Princeton invited four of them describe their ideas and efforts.

First among them was Sam Bezilla, a young, well-spoken businessman in the 7th grade at Princeton's Charter School. With his mother and friends, but providing much of the information and human energy himself, Sam and company has started a new enterprise, Green Paper Cup. It sells commercially compostable paper products, compost liners and other products to businesses, houses of worship, schools, non-profits, and residents. In addition to making their company money, they hope to change our waste habits and culture and significantly reduce our waste disposal costs.

Next was Chris Ahlers of Lawrenceville who works for Bristol-Myers Squibb where he initiated an effort within the company, but spreading to the community, to reach zero waste. He's asking people to be aware of the products they use and make an effort to substitute, for instance, re-useable ceramic cups for coffee, tea, and water, eliminating once-used paper cups that are immediately discarded. The benefits of this substitution come from saving purchasing costs, energy costs of manufacturing and transporting them, and the disposal costs, which include collecting, transporting again, and finally maintaining the landfill or composting facilities. Taken together, these cost-savings can be significant.

Steve DiNardi of New Brunswick followed, introducing his large-scale re-cycling enterprise, Colgate Paper Stock Co. It is a third generation, family owned recycling facility in New Brunswick that collects recyclables from communities and businesses throughout New Jersey but primarily in Mercer, Middlesex and Somerset counties. Once collected and sorted, the recycled glass, paper, proper plastics, and metals are sold to customers needing these materials. Colgate is the first company to focus on single-stream recycling, which increases participation and saves energy, transportation and manpower costs. DiNardi was eager to remind residents that plastics #1 and #2 are recyclable while #3 to #7 are not.

Finally, Rob Wisniewski of AgriArk in Lawrence introduced the most complex of these concepts, a holistic vision for redeveloping urban industrial sites into multi-use neighborhoods. He is pulling together a number of ideas, which include: re-imagining homestead and industrial development, providing space for small businesses and industrial arts (such as welding and design,) and making room for greenhouse agriculture and organic waste treatment. Establishing these businesses on former industrial sites not only re-invigorates the neighborhoods but benefits small businesses while encouraging social cohesion, sustainable food production, and organic waste treatment. Agriark uses architects, engineers, urban planners and pioneers, along with artists to collaborate in sharing affordable space while helping to re-imagine urban development.

Reaching out, AgriArk has contracted with Princeton University to collect some of its food waste and turn it into fertilizer, using a new fermentation process, and then sell that fertilizer to customers but also use it to grow greenhouse vegetables, which they then sell back to the university or to other markets. An idea to create a much larger plant to process regional organic waste on Duck Island in Hamilton is in the works.

If need is the mother of invention, the evident need for sustainable ideas and development has given birth to a number of them here in Central Jersey. Jigar Shah would commend these innovations as not only beneficial but essential in this changing world, if we are to adapt, survive and prosper.

Huck Fairman is a local writer who in the course of researching another project was confronted by the overwhelming evidence that we are changing the earth's environment. And that will affect life as we have known it. He hopes to present the many good local responses to this situation that are already underway.