

# Athens community should dive into energy campaign

By Muriel Grim

**R**esponding to climate change and the energy challenges it presents has generated major national discussions during the last six months – but the challenges are not just a national issue. Communities around the world, instead of waiting for national action, have responded with their own initiatives to deal with energy-related problems. The Athens area is no exception.

Southeast Ohio has traditionally been dependent on coal as an energy and income source. Coal has provided cheap power but has had many environmental costs including polluted air, lifeless orange creeks and cavernous hillsides. Today, in addition to the environmental costs, we face the prospect of rapidly increasing economic costs as emerging industrial nations create a demand for U.S. coal, thereby driving up the price.

In addition to environmental problems, all forms of nonrenewable energy are faced with short life spans. For example, oil production – which many geologists have predicted would peak at the beginning of the 21st century – could have already seen that peak. The extreme price fluctuations of oil and the economic and social turmoil they have created are examples of the danger from remaining dependent on nonrenewable sources of energy. For the health, safety, and wellbeing of future generations, as well as our own, we should consider how to move toward sustainable energy production locally as well as nationally.

Energy issues affect us individually. How can we reduce our use of energy and the cost we pay for it? Is it possible to make major changes such as solar-panel installation? Which simple changes will actually help me? Can I get financial help such as tax credits for changes I make?

Energy issues must be addressed by government for the same reasons we must address them as individuals. What are initiatives the government can consider? Of these, what do terms such as the Residential Solar Initiative, the gas aggregation ballot issue and the Cool Cities Program actually mean?

Ohio University is the area's largest energy consumer. What is the university doing to conserve energy? Can the university work with Athens citizens and government to solve our energy problems?

Our current energy suppliers have a stake in what the community does. How can they address our energy issues and problems?

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## READER'S FORUM

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responses to energy challenges and what can be done to improve our economy by changing both our energy production methods and our energy consumption. Of course, one meeting cannot begin to cover the many aspects of energy policy and practices.

Whether or how we deal with energy challenges depends on the interest and enthusiasm of the Athens community. At this time of year when the electric meter slows down, energy problems fade from view but they do not diminish. Postponing working on our problems will not solve them. If we are going to thoroughly address all of our energy challenges, we first must figure out how to coordinate our efforts. We have got to make the process of meeting energy challenges as energy efficient as we'd like our power sources and uses to be.

Although we face many difficulties, there is hope that the creativity of the people of southeast Ohio will find new pathways to prosperity and a comfortable lifestyle through our energy initiatives. Everyone's input and participation will be critical to making it happen.

*Editor's note: Muriel Grim is an Athens County resident who is trying to reduce her use of fossil fuels. She also is a retired U.S. Geological Survey geologist.*