

HighlandParkNews

Highland Park woman set to unveil Cool Globes project

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A new, colorful world was taking shape in the lobby of Am Shalom in Glencoe last week before streaking south to the lobby of the Sears Tower in Chicago.

The planet, called "Affluenza," looks like Earth with all the same continents but was covered mostly with plastic. Detergent bottles, water bottles, yogurt container tops, fake fruit, monkeys from the Barrel of Monkeys game, and some toy Chicago Cubs helmets covered the globe, carrying with it a message.

"I'm talking about over-consumption, over-consumerism," said Yair Engel, an artist from Tel-Aviv, Israel, who was drilling the plastic onto the fiberglass globe. "I'm talking about the fact that we're consuming more and more stuff."

His five-foot diameter globe is one of 120 to be displayed in Chicago in June as part of the Cool Globes art project intended to raise more awareness about global warming. Wendy D. Abrams, a member of Am Shalom who lives in Highland Park, came up with the idea for the project along with some friends.

Cool Globes is a public-private sector bi-partisan environmental education effort with most globes on display at the Field Museum with a second cluster at Navy Pier. Cool Globes will be dedicated June 1 by Mayor Richard M. Daley for a summer-long run to stir the public imagination. The globes offer a broad range of ideas and action steps for people to take in their lives, ideas which viewers can pledge to do and maybe win a Toyota Prius Hybrid.

In Israel, Engel is a well-known artist, product designer and environmentalist. He teaches sustainability and design at academies in Israel. The New Israel Fund and the Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies brought Engel to Am Shalom to create his world and his take at global warming.

Engel hopes at least a few of the thousands of people who pass his sphere will stop and think about what global warming is doing to the earth and consider ways they can make a difference, especially in the United States which uses so much energy.

"Every time I come here, the things are bigger," he said, pointing to Hummer vehicles.

Cool Globes itself may become bigger. In the works is a coffee-table book that will be distributed to expand the educational impact of the exhibit. In the meantime, the actual

organization of the project itself offers an education about how groups can work together to focus on a single project.

'Unusual alliance'

"What is unique about Cool Globes is that it's an unusual alliance," Abrams said. "I've tried not to be political. We've got an incredible group of people who stepped-up on this issue. I don't think it is a partisan issue."

Indeed, she said, one artist prepared a globe about bi-partisan leadership.

Among the "incredible group of people" are volunteers who worked 40 to 50 hours a week for the past year, she said, to make this project work. She even has her mother, Lois Mills, organizing the docent tours and their training. Shelly Kielar, also of Highland Park, has organized the sponsorships. Anne Loucks, of Winnetka, and De Gray, of Chicago, headed up the art committee.

"My hope was this would be a rallying point for the community," Abrams said.

The core of the effort is the Cool Globes. In addition, there are educational opportunities for school lessons, a Cool Globes for Cool Kids aspect sponsored by Walgreens, an under-construction web site at www.coolglobes.org, and a business leaders Round Table to be sponsored by Pepsi-Cola, Inc.

Private sector companies have been very involved with this, she said, as well as environmental organizations.

"I didn't go to foundations to underwrite this," she said. "I really wanted corporations. There are a lot of corporations out there doing good things. I want them to brag about it. I want others to follow their lead."

To extend the reach of Cool Globes, Imagination Publishing will provide a book about the project.

"It's going to be about solutions to global warming," Abrams said. "It's a story we want to tell. It's a way to take Cool Globes beyond this summer in the city."

Author Fern Shumar Chapman, of Lake Bluff, is preparing the book which will the project's message around the planet.

"We're working on this really beautiful coffee-table book," Chapman said. "We're trying to get it done by the auction (October 2)."

Chapman said each globe has its own artist and story. Her favorite is an artist who used 32 pounds of yarn to knit a sweater for the globe. Another artist addresses the issue of solar power. The topics are many.

"Someone is doing recycling," she said. "They are so funny and clever. They are so amazing."

Part of the amazement is the artist's vision and part is what non-artists can contribute or what dumpsters can offer. For example, while "Affluenza" represents Israeli artist Engel's vision, the congregation of Am Shalom also made significant contributions to it.

Engel brought with him a suitcase of Israeli products to represent his country, but it wasn't nearly enough to cover his globe. So, he rummaged through dumpsters in Evanston in search of more recyclable materials.

Members of Am Shalom got involved after Rabbi Steven Stark Lowenstein asked them to bring in recyclable materials to adorn the globe, effectively ending Engel's dumpster-diving days.

Thanks to their help, Engel said, there are "a few hundred objects" covering the globe.