

The Osbornes' Green Journey, Part 5

In just 10 months, this family has achieved quite a lot in their quest to reduce their environmental footprint.

by Donald Fraser



When I first sat down to interview the Osbornes, the summer sun was setting behind their new food garden, and barefoot kids were tumbling on the grass all around us. This time around, the winter snow has turned into the first great springtime melt, and the kids are asleep.

“Was it really back in July that we talked about doing this thing?” wondered Michelle. “Jerry, the kids and I have been through a lot since then.”

Much of what the Osborne family has been up to for the past 10 months has centred on environmental change. Deciding that they wanted to make their lives more ecologically sustainable, and their kids' future cleaner and healthier, Jerry and Michelle sought advice from a host of people in order to reach their goals. And they were kind enough to invite *Peterborough Kids* to join in the learning.

Summer found the Osbornes proudly harvesting the pesticide-free bounty from their very own garden and looking for ways to eat healthier throughout the year. “We were wondering how to eat locally and organically,” says Michelle.

With their garden just beginning to peek from its winter cover and last year's harvest long-consumed, the family has had to look elsewhere to meet its nutritional needs. So they've hooked up with an organic food delivery service.

“They buy organic produce from as close a source as humanly possible,” says Michelle. “It's not 100% local, because that would be impossible, but they source very responsibly and still allow us to put a healthy spread on the table for the kids.”

And it is a choice that resonates with her ever-hungry brood.

“When the box gets dropped off, Kylie, Caleb, and Jacob all go wild,” she says. “They'll usually go for the apples first, but anything is fair game.”

Once autumn hit, the family started looking at ways to reduce their home heating bills. After hav-

ing an ecoENERGY home energy assessment done, the Osbornes started completing simple air sealing work that will cut down on their energy bills, reduce drafts, and help with indoor air quality.

In particular, they wanted to take care of the draft coming from behind their daughter, Kylie's, bed. The oldest Osborne child is now, in six-year-old parlance, as “snug as a bug in a rug.” And her parents worry much less about her health. The great thing about the ecoENERGY program is that the Osbornes will be receiving grants for their retrofit efforts.

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In addition to improving their living space, the Osbornes have been working at making their garage/workshop usable during the winter months. As the site of Bourne's Digital Printing, Jerry's home business, the workshop is responsible for putting those organic apples on the table.

Jerry sought advice from the Green-Up assessors who had done his home visit, and learned a great deal about insulating, weather-stripping, and air sealing this very difficult space. Green-Up home energy manager, Alex Mortlock, even has Jerry looking into some new heating technologies.

“Definitely get some advice,” says Jerry. “You can save a lot of money by doing things right the first time. I learned that in the house, and I'm learn-

ing it again in the garage.”

Winter saw the Osbornes receiving advice from another source – Stephen Collette, of Your Healthy Home, who came home to do some air quality testing. “It was scary,” says Michelle of Collette's discoveries. “I had no idea how many toxic airborne particles there were in the average house. And my house was no exception.”

After the visit with Collette, the Osbornes threw out a number of household cleaners, kept a closer eye on humidity levels, and changed their furnace filters. In planning renovations for their new kitchen, they are going with stains and paints that won't off-gas harmful fumes. As well, they will be making sure that they have a good range hood that will reduce moisture from boiling pots, remove grease from the air, and prevent chemicals, such as carbon monoxide, from traveling throughout the house.

“And we're getting rid of our carpet,” she adds. With good reason. Carpets emit volatile organic compounds, as do products that accompany carpet installation such as adhesives and padding. And then there are the many things that get caught in the material. Carpets act as a “sink” for chemical and biological pollutants including pesticides, dust mites, and fungi, just to name a few.

“Plus,” says Michelle, “there's nothing like the timeless look of hardwood.”

Asked what the family learned during their journey to renewed environmental awareness, Michelle doesn't even pause before she answers. “A lot.”

“I learned that we Canadians are contributing as much or more than anyone to global warming. And to poor air quality. The kids learned the same thing. We also learned how much of a difference we could make through our individual actions.”

Jerry adds, “We also learned how much help there is out there, and how many resources.” He advises calling your municipality, or local environmental groups, such as Green-Up, or some of the other organizations his family worked with over the past months (*see sidebar*).

“Mostly we learned about how at risk the health of our children is,” says Michelle. “And how little steps can make a difference.”

“Pretty easy steps,” reminds Jerry, as he looks down on Caleb's sleeping face.

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Resources

Green Communities Canada. A national association of non-profit organizations that deliver innovative, practical environmental solutions to Canadian households and communities. 705-745-7479; www.gca.ca

Peterborough Green-Up. Provides education, services, resources and support to enable citizens to take up environmentally healthy lifestyle habits. Also provides ecoENERGY services in Peterborough and Northumberland. 705-745-3238; www.greenup.on.ca

www.zerofootprint.net. Provides the most comprehensive carbon calculator in Canada. Their goal is help organizations and individuals reduce their carbon and ecological footprints.

Your Healthy House. Performs indoor environmental testing and environmental building consulting. (705) 652-5159; www.yourhealthyhouse.ca

Peterborough Farmers' Market. Takes place every Saturday from 7 a.m. - 1 p.m. at Morrow Park, Lansdowne and George St. 705-742-FARM.

Kawartha Choice. A local initiative focused on promoting the wide variety of agricultural products grown and produced in the Kawartha region. Purpose is to create branding to identify these products for consumers eager to support our local farmers. 705-748-9771, ext 212; www.kawarthachoice.com