

wellness inside/out | pitch the plastic; might as well go with tap

BY DENNIS SEEDS | PHOTO BY LAURA WATILO BLAKE

There is a message in the bottle that Erin Huber would like everyone to know:

Drink Local. Drink Tap.

That is the name of the group that she chairs, one which aims to reconnect people with local drinking water through promotional events and knowledge that will spawn new water-drinking habits.

“By reconnecting people, businesses, and communities to water at a very individual level (drinking water), we can help educate and empower people to live better,” Huber says.

In the process, she hopes that small disturbances in the form of new knowledge causes phenomenological change in people’s minds.

“Once a person experiences this (change), they are not able to ‘unlearn’ it,” she says. “By helping provide people some drinking water basics, we hope to help create those disturbances that reconnect people with the tap and where that tap water is coming from. In the end, increased environmental (water) stewardship is what we hope to generate so our local water can truly be sustainable by 2019 in Northeast Ohio.”

The campaign is an effort of a volunteer group called Sustainable Water 2019 that formed at the Sustainable Cleveland 2019 Summit in 2009. The group is a project of the nonprofit Institute of Applied Phenomenology, of which Huber is the program development manager.

Tap water is less expensive than bottled water, she says — to the wallet and the earth. Many resources are used to manufacture and market bottles, and most do not get recycled.

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As for the quality of tap water, Huber notes that bottled water companies are not obligated to report their internal testing to consumers; that plastic leaches chemicals into the bottled water; and that the FDA does not require third-party testing or regularly monitor any bottled water company.

Meanwhile, “local drinking water is highly regulated and tested many times throughout the day for safety,” she adds. “Dentists and doctors have actually commended us for our work and say they can always tell when someone drinks tap water.”

While the Drink Local Drink Tap campaign has adopted Edgewater Beach and performs monthly beach cleanups and staffs information tables at



Drink Local Drink Tap chair Erin Huber: “Our goal is to create societal shifts.”

community events, its biggest project for the year is the water education program for inner-city students that will be completed on World Water Day, March 22. On that day, 176 students will donate 176 2-liter bottles that they had decorated to their sister school in Uganda. The bottles each carry a day’s worth of water, which compares to the 88 gallons an American uses daily. At the Cleveland International Film Festival screening of the documentary “Tapped,” the students will transfer their water into reusable containers.

Huber knew even as a child that people should care about pollution, other living things, and

each other. She will complete her Master of Science degree in urban studies from Cleveland State University in May.

“I have always been connected to water specifically, but I think everything has just spiraled into how I am now. By understanding that everything matters, I think I just try to help others understand how our lifestyles have a deep impact on the planet and its people.

“My father always taught me to stand up for things or people who don’t have a voice — the vulnerable. The environment has no voice.” ■

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