

McLean CONNECTION

Not Buying For a Year

A couple shares experience in not buying anything new for a year.

By [Paul D. Shinkman](#), *The Connection*
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Over the whirring of an espresso machine and the clinking of oversized coffee cups, Jim Dieter and Helene Shore of Reston spoke on Sunday afternoon, Oct. 26 about their experience spending all of 2007 without buying anything new.

Upwards of 60 people packed themselves into the Conscious Bean Coffee House, a small, independently owned café in Great Falls, to hear the couple recount their experience of drastically reducing their consumption to simplify their lives and have a lesser impact on the environment.

While the two deny responsibility for the current state of the national economy, the recent financial melt-down attracted many local residents to the highly-attended event, like Karen Paull of Arlington.

"I was curious about how they were able to not buy new things for a year," said Paull. "With the state of the [U.S.] economy and stock market, I wanted to get some tips for myself."

DIETER AND SHORE began their discussion by explaining how they established parameters for their challenge. For a year, the two would not buy anything new except groceries, wine, and basic hygienic products like toothpaste and deodorant. "We like being around people," Shore quipped.

While the endeavor would require a significant lifestyle modification for the couple — both of whom admittedly enjoy shopping — the two agreed that finding alternatives was surprisingly easy.

"We didn't 'dumpster dive'," said Dieter, "but we did learn to find used stuff."

For essential items, the couple sought out second-hand suppliers and even found distributors for items like used, but still functional, drinking-water filters. Instead of buying presents for friends and family, the two gave equally thoughtful services to the recipients, like a donation to a charity of which that person was particularly fond, or a night out at a restaurant or sporting event.

"It's really liberating", said Shore, "particularly after you get your mind out of being programmed for buying."

Dieter and Shore were inspired to undertake this initiative through their involvement in the EcoStewards Alliance, a locally-based non-profit environmental advocacy organization which sponsored Sunday's event. Through their discussion group — called a "Discovery Circle" — based in the Blueberry Hill community, the couple learned about what the alliance calls "voluntary simplicity" and decided to apply it directly to their lives.

VOLUNTARY SIMPLICITY "is about being a more thoughtful consumer and having the Earth in mind," said Maureen Becker of Reston, another EcoStewards Alliance member who helped organize the event. Becker met Dieter and Shore last winter and had been



Photos by Paul D. Shinkman/The Connection

Speakers Jim Dieter and Helene Shore, center, flanked by event organizer and fellow EcoSteward Alliance member Mauren Becker of Reston, left, and fellow Discovery Circle member Leigh Glenn of McLean, right.

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eager for them to share their experience with a wider audience. She eventually came upon Kathy Huff, who founded and operates the Conscious Bean Coffee House as a venue for community groups focusing on environmental and health issues, and agreed to host the event.

"I think it's very interesting how many people are looking to simplify their lives," said Huff, commenting on the unexpectedly large turnout for Sunday's event.

"I'm interested in this idea of simplicity," said Nicole Davison of Reston. "I don't know that I would want to do it for that long, but getting hints for how to buy less is great."

Dieter and Shore encouraged those in attendance to forgo purchasing new items, particularly together with a group, and not necessarily for a whole year. "Just start with a day," said Shore. "It may turn to a week, then to a month. You'll see how good it feels."

More information on EcoStewards Alliance events and initiatives can be found on its Web site at ecostewardsalliance.org.



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