

Youth deliver the word on sustainability

Emma Taylor
Kingston This Week

The lights were out but their vision was clear. Students who took part in a speechwriting contest about sustainability delivered their winning entries at the Unplugged Earth Hour concert at Market Square Saturday, March 27.

The two winning speeches were by Ivor Benderavage, 12, a Grade 7 student at École Secondaire Mille-Îles, and Kathleen Smith, 17, a Grade 12 student at Napanee District Secondary School.

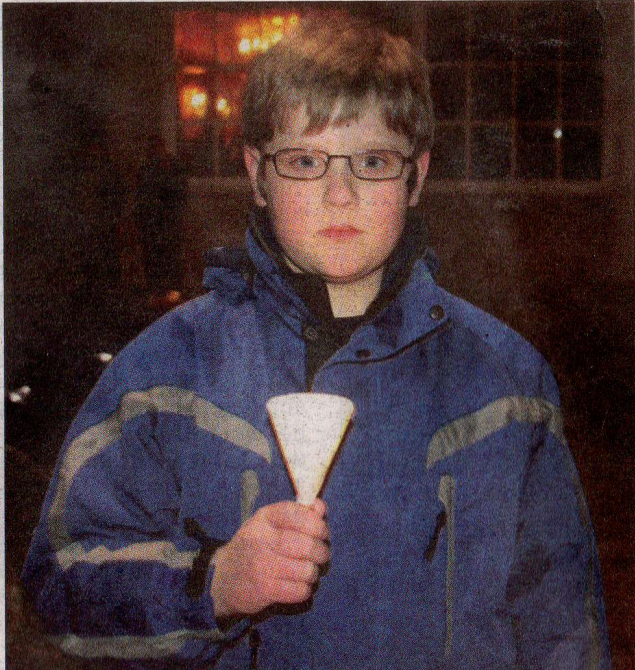
The competition, sponsored by the Kingston Sustainability Centre, invited area students to write speeches in French or English for the World Wildlife Fund's (WWF) Earth Hour 2010 celebrations.

The experience offered them an opportunity to get their message out and gain valuable experience in public speaking.

This year for the first time, the Kingston Sustainability Centre volunteered to help organize the Earth Hour celebrations. Staff had been trying to think of what would be an interesting project for Earth Hour, and realized that while there were lots of ideas involving leaders or dignitaries in the community, the perspective of youth was missing.

"We thought running a speech competition around the topics of sustainable development, sustainability or energy conservation was our best bet because all those issues are so important now," said Dan Hendry, sustainability programs manager.

The centre, located at 193 Princess St., is a non-profit resource centre for sustainable development offering information on solar energy, renewable energy, composting,



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Ivor Benderavage, 12, was the winner in the French speechwriting contest.

waste, and local food to name a few. The centre is continuously updating community resources to provide new solutions to the Kingston community, and works with a number of community partners.

Students were asked to write a three-minute speech which answered one of three questions: What is your vision or message for a sustainable Kingston, Canada or world?; what does a sustainable community mean to you?; and what is the impact and/or importance of conservation in today's world?

The submissions were narrowed down to 10 speeches and students presented them at a speech-off on March



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Kathleen Smith, 17, read her winning speech on sustainability at the Earth Hour celebrations at Market Square.

13. The speeches were judged on clarity, relevance of message, passion and enthusiasm, public speaking skills and ability to speak in front of large crowds.

Benderavage and Smith came out the winners. Benderavage challenged Kingston to find ways to conserve more energy, and gave some suggestions on how to achieve this goal.

"There are poor people in Kingston who must choose between feeding their children and paying their electricity bills, because their homes are so poorly insulated. How shameful in a city that considers itself "progressive," he said in his speech.

Although he is only 12, he is already very socially conscious. He is a member of the Kingston Junior Field Naturalists, a local conservation and advocacy group whose goal are to help young people understand and protect the natural environment.

Smith, who has been involved with her school's environmental club for three years and is part of a community environmental action group called Napanee Green Lights, feel working together is the key to success.

"For sustainability to be a viable future for Canada and for the world, we must collectively work to un-stick ourselves from over-consumption," said Smith in her speech.

She thinks the idea of "un-sticking" bad habits that lead to