

## Open Forum: Cathy Strickler

# Celebrate Earth Week In April

As another beautiful spring unfolds in the Shenandoah Valley, we bask in the sunlight, soaking up it's welcome warmth. We embrace the rain that gives us abundant crops and are so thankful for our fortunate place on earth. It's a good time to have a celebration called Earth Day on April 22. And this year, we are fortunate to have a weeklong celebration at Court Square Theater for Earth Week April 17-24.

This year is an important year to celebrate and to learn more about our Earth since so much is being said about the health of our world. A good way to do this is to see "The 11th Hour" with Leonardo DiCaprio that will be at Court Square Theater April 17-20. This film makes the point that to keep what we love we need to know what is happening outside our valley. It makes a strong case for being aware, alert and keeping an open mind to new ideas.

Court Square Theater is also featuring Robert Wolfe, a Bridgewater College graduate who is now a NASA scientist, on Tuesday, April 22, and Richard Cizik, an evangelical minister, on Thursday, April 24. Both men are dedicated to understanding and caring for our world.

Now it's not just the scientists

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—NEWS ITEM



who are getting involved. Leilane Munter, a former NASCAR racer who just switched to open-wheel cars, has made global climate change a top priority in her life. Every time she races, she gives about \$120 so that an acre of rain forest is put into a trust (called carbon offsetting). She has testified on Capitol Hill and met with top Republican leaders there. Her Web site is [www.carbonfree-girl.com](http://www.carbonfree-girl.com)

Also, faith based groups are increasing their involvement. The Virginia Interfaith Power and Light organization, which is supporting Harrisonburg's Earth Week, has its own Web site, [www.vipl.org](http://www.vipl.org), which promotes

caring for God's creation with thoughtfulness and a new level of leadership.

The major players affecting how our government responds to our changing world are the coal and oil companies. They have one of the biggest lobbying staffs in Washington. They are protecting themselves with huge campaign contributions that help with their efforts to ensure that laws won't cut into their profit. But their profit is our loss, as the massive use of coal and oil are detrimental to the world's functioning. The use of coal and oil products makes carbon dioxide gas, the main "greenhouse" gas. These gases stay in the atmos-

phere and cause all the problems we face.

The solution to this situation is for regular people to tell their elected representatives what they think. When enough people do this, our representatives will listen and rethink with renewed vigor all the new information that is unfolding.

There are concerned people who genuinely question the validity of the conclusions of those who say we need to make changes. It is hard to find out that what we're doing may not be the best thing for future generations. We need each other to figure this out and it takes courage, time and

persistence. In the end, the rewards are that we leave a healthier, richer world for those yet to come and we feel deeply satisfied knowing that together we made many right decisions.

Climate change is something we must work on every day to help our beloved Valley stay the way it is. One way to get started is to come to any of the Earth Week events at Court Square Theater and connect with people there who can help you take the first steps. As Anne Frank said "How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world."

*Strickler lives in Harrisonburg.*