

# Crimson and Cream



# Go Green

**When it comes to promoting environmental issues, the campus population is walking the walk, talking the talk—and riding the bike.**

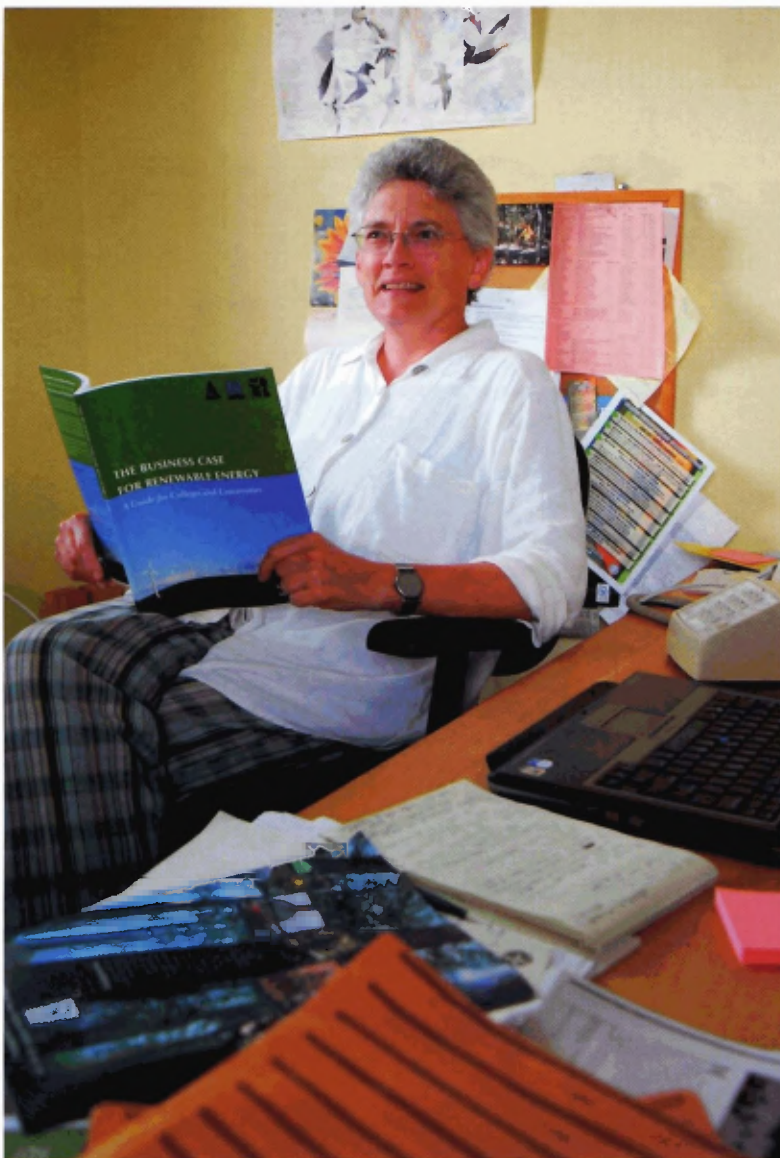
BY LYNETTE LOBBAN  
PHOTOS BY ROBERT TAYLOR

When Al Gore visited the University of Oklahoma in March, more than 7,000 people—a record-breaking crowd for a campus speaker—filed into the Lloyd Noble Center to hear the former vice president deliver global warnings from his Academy Award-winning documentary “An Inconvenient Truth.” Although there may have been those in the audience who were curious to see the man “who used to be the next president of the United States,” most of the students, faculty and administrators in the arena were already in sync with his environmental message. So much so, that the University’s new colors very well could be crimson and green.

Environmentalists say there is no silver bullet to counteract global warming—but there is a silver shotgun, an approach OU has taken for the past decade or more. Bike lanes, recycling bins, compressed natural gas vehicles and an expanded offering of classes on environmental issues

OU’s recycling efforts began as a student volunteer program in 1990. Now managed by OU Physical Plant, containers for paper, plastics and aluminum can be found in nearly every building on campus.





are just a few of the collaborative efforts between the administration and students groups like OUr Earth. From compost to curriculum, the University is setting the stage for a paradigm shift of awareness in a generation poised to inherit a planet in peril.

Two years ago, OU became the first public university to join the Chicago Climate Exchange. The brainchild of famed economist Richard Sandor, (see related story page 9) CCX uses the free market system to provide economic incentives to businesses when they voluntarily lower their carbon emissions. OU President David L. Boren sees CCX membership as a responsible choice for an institution of higher learning.

"In passing our values on to the next generation, it is my belief that this institution itself be a role model for environmental stewardship and consciousness," he says. "Through our efforts

**Deborah Dalton has been director of OU's Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Environment since 2003. The program is growing in popularity as a major, with careers opportunities in a variety of fields.**

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To date, five universities, the states of New Mexico and Illinois, six major U.S. cities and more than 300 companies from DuPont to IBM have joined the exchange. Upon joining CCX, each participant is awarded an allotment of Carbon Financial Instruments (CFIs) based on their energy consumption and current emissions. Participants sign a legally binding agreement to lower emissions by a certain percentage each year. Those who meet or beat their goal may sell their surplus CFIs in a free market environment, similar to the New York Stock Exchange. Those who do not achieve their target must purchase CFIs to cover emissions over their stated goal.

Burr Millsap, associate vice president for administrative affairs, says the concept is not only environmentally responsible, but also sound business practice.

"Most businesses, if they have a financial incentive to do so, will find ways to reduce their greenhouse gases. Usually a bi-product of that is, while figuring out how reduce emissions, they also come up with more economical ways to produce their product. So at the end of the year, they are emitting less greenhouse gases, they're gaining economic value through the selling of surplus CFIs, and they are making a positive contribution to their bottom line. That speaks to them."

Millsap says on a university level that translates into finding more efficient ways to heat and cool buildings, streamlining transportation fleets and exploring alternative energy sources.

"OU has its own independent system for heating and cooling," he explains. "The natural gas that we purchase to run our chilled water and steam plants is the commodity that determines our CFIs. With regard to electricity, we are currently buying our total available allotment of wind power from OG&E and have been for two years. We can also generate our own electricity, and do that on a real-time basis

when it becomes more efficient and economical to do so."

The University is in the process of hiring professional engineers to inventory systems in each of its buildings and make suggestions for improvements in insulation, windows and lighting, which will save energy and reduce emissions.

"Clearly, as an institution that has the responsibility for the hearts and minds of young people coming through, we would be grossly negligent if we didn't take a leadership role in the

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reduction of greenhouse gases," concludes Millsap. "It's in our economical interests to be fuel-efficient, but it also fulfills our mission as an institution of research and higher learning."

In April, President Boren signed the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, which provides a framework for institutions of higher learning to become carbon neutral. Since March, more than 200 universities across the nation have joined the cause.

"I think we're in the middle of a flip," says Deborah Dalton, director of OU's Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Environment Program. "I think college campuses across the nation are exploring what they can do on this issue to educate and facilitate change. I no longer feel like I am alone howling in the wilderness with this idea of infusing sustainability across the curriculum. And it's not just the curriculum, but University operations, physical plant, food service, facilities—the whole campus—actively, overtly trying to find a better way to live on this earth."

Among her duties as director, Dalton teaches Consumption and Environment 1013, a watershed class that explores the relationship between the production and consumption of human needs—food, energy, transportation and housing—and its effects on the environment, such as global climate change, air and water pollution, and habitat alteration.

Students say Dalton, who took over the IPE program in August 2003, has changed the way they look at the world. Eric Pollard, a bicyclist who drove an SUV in high school, last spring helped author a student congress climate commitment bill, approved by President Boren, that will work in harmony with the Presidents Climate Commitment.

"When I first came to OU, I took Deborah's class, and it changed the way I think," says Pollard, a member of OUR Earth and the Student Congress External Affairs Committee. "She



**Theta Dempsey, director of parking and transportation, has been an advocate of environmental initiatives for years. In 2005, her department added bike racks to CART buses, giving students greater flexibility in navigating the campus without the need of cars or parking spaces. Since its inception, usage is up more than 40 percent campuswide.**

makes you stop and ask yourself, 'Where did this coffee come from? How much energy did it take to get it here?' It's an obvious thing, but it just doesn't register sometimes. It's like flipping a switch. Now I think about the hidden environmental costs and try to make more responsible choices."

Whitney Pearson, another OUR Earth member, has decided to make protecting the environment her life's work. "I wanted to be a lawyer," she says. "My mom put the idea in my head, 'If you're going to be a lawyer, why not be an environmental lawyer?' So I started looking into what lawyers and lobbyists do."

Last summer Pearson went to an environmental justice training program in Los Angeles sponsored by the Sierra Student Coalition. There she learned about the Campus Climate Challenge, a nationwide movement that enlists the aid of high school and college students in reducing carbon emissions on their campuses and raising awareness among their peers.

"I came back to school and went to the first OUR Earth meeting of the year and told the others about it," says Pearson. The students set goals, such as improving bike lanes, and hosted speakers and events during Earth Week. This summer Pearson is working for the Sierra Student Coalition in Washington, D.C.



Danny Tortip, president of OUR Earth, realizes that getting students, staff and faculty to change their habits and attitudes is a tough job, but says that with President Boren's leadership, he feels that OU can really make an impact.

"Joining the Chicago Climate Exchange was a really good idea, and now, with the Presidents Climate Commitment, we have definite guidelines to follow," he says. "It's hard to be subtle about something so important."

Many departments have been working behind the scenes to reduce carbon emissions and eliminate waste on their own turf. A prime example is Theta Dempsey, who as director of parking and transportation has been working to green up OU for years.

"In the past five years, CART (Cleveland Area Rapid Transit) use has increased 36 percent," says Dempsey. "We started CART primarily as a way to lessen the parking problem on campus, but the fact is that it really reduces emissions by not having all those cars in traffic, or in parking lots idling, waiting for a spot to open up."

Three years ago, Dempsey pushed for significant improvements to the department's Park and Ride program, which allows students to leave their cars at Lloyd Noble Center and hop a CART bus to the main campus. Amenities such as a resurfaced lot, additional lights and increased hours of service have more than doubled ridership, keeping more than 1,700 cars a day from

**Dave Annis, left, director of food service, and Greg Brown, assistant manager at Crossroads, use only cage-free eggs at the Union restaurant. By August, all the eggs served at Crossroads will be purchased locally from a farmer who raises free-range chickens.**

cruising campus. The use of bike racks, which Dempsey added to the CART buses in 2005, has increased more than 40 percent since its inaugural year.

A new transportation facility on south campus will allow for increased use of compressed natural gas vehicles and the addition of biodiesel and ethanol tanks, along with the usual unleaded and diesel. The University currently has 24 CNG vehicles—

three CART buses, four vans, two sedans and 15 dual-fuel vehicles. There are also 23 flex-fuel vehicles, which are ethanol capable, and 42 electric vehicles.

"I came here in 1983, and no one was even talking about environmental issues then," Dempsey observes. "And now, there are so many people in so many unheralded ways doing their part."

One of those people is David Annis, director of food service, who has taken initiatives from using local food sources to experimenting with compostable dinner plates. Last year, Annis switched to cage-free eggs (about 150 dozen a week) in the Union's Crossroads Restaurant and will soon offer organic beef from a local rancher.

"We are starting to look more at sustainability issues," he says. "We are looking for someone to take our fryer oil and use it in a bio-diesel project. We buy about 2,500 30-pound cases a year,



Quyen Arana, right, associate director for Technology and Industry Partnerships at OU's K20 Center, was instrumental in founding OU's Earth as an undergraduate in 1989. He and current OU's Earth member Eric Pollard look over some of the group's accomplishments of the past 18 years.

and what's nice about a bio-diesel project, is that we buy the same kind of oil, so it's consistent as far as the refining goes."

His department has long since used napkins and other paper goods made with a 60 percent post-consumer blend, but Annis says food scraps make paper plates ineligible for recycling. So, at a recent luncheon at the National Weather Center, he tested a new tableware made from a cornstarch compound that can be composted.

"We have little pieces working in a lot of different areas," says Annis. "I truly believe that being ecologically sound is good, sound business, too."

Another success story is OU's recycling program, which began in the fall of 1990 as a student volunteer program and expanded significantly with administrative backing in 1998. Since FY 1999/2000, OU's recycling efforts have kept 3,841 tons of paper products out of landfills.

"We now have containers in almost every building on campus and in the dorms," says coordinator Greg Brezinski.

# OU's Green Initiatives

In spring 2007, President Boren approved a University of Oklahoma Student Association sponsored bill relating to the nationwide campus climate challenge.

## Long-term goals of the bill include:

- a University pledge of carbon neutrality by the year 2050;
- using 15 percent of electricity from purchased or produced renewable energy within the next two years;
- a 50 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by the year 2025;
- a policy within the next two years stating that new campus buildings be built with U.S. Green Building Council's LEED standards;
- the ongoing implementation of policies that encourages students, faculty and staff to use public transportation and encouraging bicycling and walking when commuting on and off campus;
- the ongoing purchase of hybrid, hybrid/electric, ethanol, biofuel and compressed natural gas for University fleet vehicles; and
- increasing educational opportunities for students to learn about stewardship and the impact of consumption on the environment.

## Short-term goals include:

- a Housing/Greek recycling/energy-use competition within the next year;
- a policy stating that all IT computers hibernate when they are not being used and that IT printing settings/properties be set to automatic two-sided printing within the next year;
- a policy that begins the installation of motion sensor/dimming lighting systems in campus buildings within the next year; and
- a policy that requires that a portion of the printing paper bought by faculty and staff be recycled paper and that a price discount be negotiated with the supplier within the next year.



*"This year has been a great year for us. We have already smashed our record for recycling for the year, and we are not done yet."*

These include bins for office paper, newspaper, plastic and aluminum. The materials are collected by OU's custodial department and transported to larger containers outside the buildings and then taken to the campus recycling facility for sorting and bailing.

"This year has been a great year for us," says Brezinski. "We have already smashed our record for recycling for the year, and we are not done yet. Our old record was set last year at 514.12 tons of paper products; so far this year, it's 586.81 tons."

Brezinski says they are also looking into building a new recycling facility and installing a large shredder for all paper on campus. The most frustrating part for Brezinski is spreading awareness that these recycling opportunities exist and to get people to use them. Even with their numbers up, he estimates that only 12 percent of all OU's recyclable materials are making it into the bins.

**ABOVE:** Greg Brezinski, recycling coordinator for OU's Physical Plant, estimates that more than 500 tons of paper were saved from landfills due to OU's recycling efforts last year alone.

**LEFT:** Willie Finley and fellow Physical Plant employees distribute more than 200 recycling barrels for cans and bottles around the OU campus for each home football game.

Pollard would like to see that change, viewing increased awareness as an important component to a college education. "The reason people come to the University in the first place is to become better people," he says. "So, why not include taking care of the environment?"

*Lynette Lobban is associate editor of Sooner Magazine.*

