

Every day really is Earth Day

By Mark Gabrynowicz

Earth Day is coming. This year's Earth Day will be celebrated on April 22. The purpose of this worldwide event is to draw our attention to the need for active engagement to protect and sustain our planet. If we don't engage, who will? To help raise awareness, the City of Atlantic Beach Environmental Stewardship Committee (ESC) will post three upcoming articles leading up to Earth Day. Of course, given the significance of sustaining our environment, every day really is Earth Day.

I'm not really sure why Earth Day is not called Water Day, because most of our planet you will notice when you look at a globe or a photo taken from space is mostly covered with water. 29% of the total surface of planet earth is land. The remainder, 71% of the total surface of earth is water of which 97% is salt water and only three percent of that is fresh water. Further, 57% of planet earth land is uninhabitable (think deserts and mountains) which does not give us humans and the rest of terrestrial life much space.

We have some knowledge of the oceans, but given the space they occupy on our planet and the many important roles they play in keeping us alive, we truly need to know more. Past thinking that the oceans are an unlimited resource is certainly false. Many of the planet's fertile fishing areas have been overfished, threatening many species of marine life. Dumping all kinds of waste into the oceans, thinking that it will be gone forever, is also false.

In addition to the many resources, we consume from the ocean, they are the great regulator of several of our life critical systems. Phytoplankton a microscopic plant, acts the same way terrestrial plants do in that they produce oxygen (some estimates are as high as 70% of all oxygen produced) and absorb carbon dioxide. Think of all the carbon that is contained in all those shells. Ocean currents distribute heat energy from the sun, making hot places cooler and cold places warmer. Almost all of the rain we get on land comes from evaporation that occurs over the oceans. Simply stated, we would not have an Earth Day if we did not have planet Water.

We do enjoy our beaches. They contribute much to our local economy, provide great recreation opportunities, and they are at our doorstep. So, the next time you are at the beach, give a thought or two to how the ocean sustains you. If you are a student or even a retired student do some research by diving into some books about the oceans.

To learn more about ESC's and Word Revolt's Earth Day Art competition, visit www.coab.us/earthdayart.

Gabrynowicz, of Atlantic Beach, chairs the Atlantic Beach Environmental Stewardship Committee.