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OCCA links to carpooling website

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COOPERSTOWN _ The Otsego County Conservation Association is encouraging carpooling through a national ride-share website.

The nonprofit environmental organization, which promotes the enjoyment and sustainable use of Otsego County's natural resources through education, advocacy, resource management, research and planning, has posted a link to www.eRideShare.com.

According to OCCA president Martha Clarvoe, the goal is to support greater sharing of transportation between county residents and ultimately to conserve energy and help reduce the carbon footprint of individual residents.

Clarvoe said she came across the website when she was searching for carpooling for personal use. She said the OCCA is getting ready to start a new campaign about low-carbon diets to promote reducing energy usage, and the website happened to fit in with the topic.

"With the high price of gas these days," she said, "OCCA hopes county residents will do what they can to reduce their personal contribution to pollution and increase their contribution to energy conservation by participating in eRideShare."

eRide is a national website that connects commuter or cross-country travelers going in the same direction. It was created in 1999 by Steve Schoeffler of St. Louis. He said the idea came about when he was learning about the Internet, and he decided he wanted to do something to connect people.

Since the website's inception, it has served more than 1 million visitors. From February through July, website hits have quadrupled, according to Schoeffler, as when gas prices go up, hits go up.

"Our dependence on oil has a huge impact on our role in the world," Schoeffler said. "People need to do their part in order to diminish carbon emissions. It is very important."

Carpooling is easy and it can save a lot of money, he said.

According to information posted on the website taken from the American Automobile Association, it costs an average of 54.1 cents per mile to drive a car. This includes estimate includes gasoline, oil, maintenance, tires and depreciation.

For a 40-mile round-trip commute, this comes to \$21.64 per day, \$454 monthly and \$5,453 annually.

Another benefit of carpooling includes not having to worry about the wear and tear of a vehicle, which in the long run costs more than gas, added Schoeffler.

"People don't always take in count the fact that a vehicle's depreciation will still cost the same no matter what the cost of gasoline," Schoeffler said.

"There is a lot of money to be saved, and a lot of people end up making good friends out of it," he said.

The website says driving can be stressful, and socializing through sharing rides can be a stress-reducer. On a broader scale, oil imports to meet national demands increase the U.S. trade deficit, so shared rides help the national economy, according to the website.

Clarvoe said eRideShare is user-friendly.

"All you have to do is visit the OCCA website at www.occainfo.org and look under 'Energy Issues' on our homepage, click on 'Looking for a car pool?' then click on eRideShare and enter your information," she said.

Clarvoe said users only communicate through e-mail, so she believes the site is safe.

There is no cost to become a member of eRideShare, but people are asked to fill out a membership form.

The website also offers a carpooling service with additional features for large employers. For more information, call Schoeffler at (618) 530-4842 or e-mail infor@erideshare.com.

Clarvoe said although carpooling may not be as efficient in rural areas, she believes people may be surprised how many people in their neighborhood are traveling in the same direction. She says it offers a good opportunity to connect with people they might not have known.