

Episode 3: Celebrating Sustainability Month

Omar Brown

Welcome to Libraries Out Loud, a podcast produced by the University of Buffalo Libraries. I'm your host. Omar Brown, Evening Supervisor in Silverman Library on the UB's North campus. In each episode of the Libraries Out Loud, we'll explore the connections between the UB Libraries and the research, learning, teaching and creative activities of our faculty, students, and staff. The focus of this month's episode is sustainability and the environment. To kick things off with some background information and an interview with an expert in this area. Here is Brian Sajecki, an Undergraduate Education Librarian at UB.

Brian Sajecki

According to <https://www.epa.gov/>, sustainability is based on a simple principle. Everything that we need for our survival and well-being depends either directly or indirectly on our natural environment. To pursue sustainability is to create and maintain the conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony to support present and future generations. Focusing on sustainability is not anything new. The first Earth Day was celebrated on April 22nd, 1970. Organized by Gaylord Nelson, the former governor and state senator of Wisconsin, it was created to teach Americans about conservation and the environment, especially awareness with both. According to the National Ocean Service, nearly 10 percent of the US population of the time participated, including colleges, universities, and public schools. Since then, Earth Day has become a mainstay throughout the United States. The University of Buffalo is no stranger to sustainability endeavors, encouraging multiple ways for the community to be more green in their everyday lives. In honor of April being sustainability month at the University, we thought it only appropriate to sit down with a person who holds sustainability near to their heart and who perhaps has the longest title of anyone at UB, Jim Gordon, a recent retiree from the University Libraries. Hi Jim, how are you doing?

Jim Gordon

Good, Brian, how are you?

Brian Sajecki

Doing OK. Very good day. So, Jim is going to be meeting with us today to talk about a lot of different things involving sustainability. But first, I want to talk with you about what your role was with within the University of Buffalo Libraries. And do you actually miss it, now that you retired?

Jim Gordon

Even in retirement, I'm still chair of the Professional Staff Senate's Sustainable Living Committee Subcommittee on Alternative Transportation, so I don't miss it because I'm still doing it. UB is a special place. It encourages retirees to continue participation, and it allows me to maintain contact with a lot of friends that I've made and colleagues. while I was working at the University

Brian Sajecki

I had a feeling when you retired that you would still be doing it, and that's great to hear because you were ever-present and you did so many great things for your colleagues. And it's just great to hear. Great to hear. So just to kind of get a little focused here, I have a couple of questions regarding just many different facets of sustainability. The first one I'm starting with personally, what do you think is the largest threat to the environment? And if you wanted to talk about multiple threats that you're especially worried about, feel free.

Jim Gordon

So, there are multiple threats to the environment. There's local issues such as dioxin at Love Canal that keeps resurfacing. City of Buffalo has problems with sewage overflows when it rains. There are plastic intrusions into the Great Lakes. There are many other sources of air and water pollution. Climate change due to global warming, primarily from greenhouse gases, is consistently pointed to as the large-scale emergency that needs immediate attention.

Bryan Sajecki

That is, that's a lot of different potential threats. So, be that as it may, do you believe then that UB is environmentally sound and conscious as an institution?

Jim Gordon

I do. I've been here was more than 20 years. And if you count to my student days, going back to 50 years and I've seen a gradual evolution and increased consciousness part of UB administration. When I look at the buildings that are dominating the North Campus, I see a lot of brick, no insulation, no thought was given to those buildings on insulation at all. Our heat goes up and out the walls so fast in those buildings. And yet, in the newer buildings that we've built, look around. You can see Greiner Hall. You can see the Pharmacy building, the new Medical Campus. A clear change in attitude. We have LEED certified buildings within the Libraries. Our recent renovation of a Silverman Library in Capen Hall, a great example of how to transform an older building that really was not environmentally sound and make it LEED certified. It was quite a project. It's over an acre of indoor space that we've converted and made green. So, yeah, I think the Libraries and the University on the whole. Big change over time.

Bryan Sajecki

So, is there anything that you do in your own life, then to be more sustainable or environmentally friendly?

Jim Gordon

Yes, I. Everything about what I do, I chose to live in a walkable neighborhood. It's well connected by public transit and bicycle. Many years ago, I stopped taking planes and started taking Amtrak. I never regretted that decision. I'm a community activist. I'm a treasurer for a group called Citizens for Regional Transit, which is an organization that's dedicated to improving public transit for Erie and Niagara counties. I meet with politicians and local decision makers, including Chuck Schumer, who is now the Speaker of the I want to say Speaker of the House is wrong. He's the Senate. What is his official title? Senate Majority Leader, yeah. If I were to have thought three months ago that I would be talking with the Senate Majority Leader about public transportation issues, I would have thought I would be crazy, and I wouldn't have believed it myself. And yet, shortly after he became Senate Majority Leader, I got an invitation to talk with him. And he's very much involved in these issues. So, yeah, I do a lot about the environment.

Bryan Sajecki

Well, that's great, because that's such a shining example of some of the things that anybody could do to change the way that they live if they had a really strong stake in trying to be more, more conscious of the environment around them. So, one thing that has consistently come up in a lot of the conversations that I've had and a lot of the research that I had regarding sustainability is the kind of divisive notion of, is sustainability and thinking green synonymous? So, in your personal opinion, what do you think about that?

Jim Gordon

Well, to me, there's a lot of overlap between the two terms. When I hear the term sustainability, it implies to me that it involves long range thinking, long range planning, how to set things up for future so that when you're thinking green, you're keeping a mindset that every single action that we take, no matter how small it is, has an effect on the environment.

Bryan Sajecki

Yeah, I, I totally agree with you on that. And it's just always wonderful to hear from somebody who has a good perspective, very sound scholarly perspective on the situation just because you live it. When you were working in the Libraries, did you try and spread a green message, so to speak? Or do you feel like if you do that, it might be imposing to some people?

Jim Gordon

At UB, I have never felt that we were ever imposing on anybody. I'm very proud of the UB Libraries for a bunch of reasons. Personally, I wanted to put on a film series, a sustainable film series, with the help of Lori Widzinski, Mike Kankiewicz and Karlen Chase. We were able to identify films that we held in our collection that had screening rights with them, So, if you want to put on movies and you have an audience, you have to have legal screening rights, but we have some that have that. So, then I asked our libraries administration, my bosses, whether or not I could put these films together into a themed film series and environmental themed film series. And they not only gave me a green light, but they gave me lots of encouragement. Our Library Staff, our Librarians, are involved locally and nationally on the environment. Locally, we have Janiece, who chairs the Professional Staff Senate's Sustainable Living Committee. We have Fred Stoss, who chaired the American Libraries Association Sustainability Roundtable. But we have people on our staff that exemplify the very idea that every citizen, what you say, what you do matters. People will respect you. People understand that if you work, or are a student at UB, you probably know what you're talking about and it's amazing how respected UB faculty, staff and students are in the world.

Brian Sajecki

For sure. It's a worldwide thing. You, you go to UB, you teach at UB, you work at UB. People tend to listen a little bit more. All right. Well, thank you, Jim. I really do appreciate you sitting down and talking with me, and I wish you all the best.

Jim Gordon

Thanks a lot, Brian, and best to you, too.

Omar Brown

Next up, we have Nicole Thomas, another Undergraduate Education Librarian from the University. She will highlight some sustainability endeavors the Libraries can embrace, as well as we remark upon strategies our Libraries employees as well as the university as a whole.

Nicole Thomas

Here at UB, the Libraries are not only directly involved in the push for sustainability, we're also working with the programs and members of the University community. When the Silverman Library in Capen was renovated, it became a green building and LEED certified. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. It provides a framework for efficient and cost saving green buildings and to receive elite certification, a project team must demonstrate compliance with all mandatory requirements. Under the lead rating system, Silverman is certified silver. This is due to the use of recycled building materials, reuse fixtures in existing spaces and installation of systems to improve air quality and reduce water use. And back in 2017, over 1000 items from the UB's Green Library, formerly housed on South Campus in the UB Green Office, were added to collections in Lockwood and Silverman Libraries. This

collection consists of periodicals, books, and media, which covers sustainable lifestyles, environmental politics, green energy and more. Library faculty and staff are also on the front lines of the sustainability effort. Some library colleagues are serving on the Professional Staff Senate Sustainability Committee and working with other organizations locally and nationally. But you don't have to serve on a committee or a hard hat in a building renovation to make a difference. Remember, starting small can make an impact, too, and many in the UB Libraries community are taking part in their own ways. A recent survey of the UB Libraries community found that 38 percent participate in the local produce share, while some even shop locally at farmers markets and the Co-Op. Twenty five percent are involved in a walking club or challenge. When recycling clothing, ninety four percent of respondents participate, one saying they buy only from thrift stores or ethical and sustainable companies. Many others responded they curb clothing waste by rotating through their current wardrobe and donate an article of clothing when purchasing new and never from a fast fashion company. The Buy Nothing Facebook groups also got a shout out as some respondents regularly give and take items from the group for themselves and their children. 70 percent donate to local food banks and pantries. And one respondent donates money to food banks. Very efficient. Thirty three percent said they give away plant cuttings or participate in a community garden. Finally, when asked if they participated in some kind of material-recycling program, the majority of respondents say they have attended events to recycle electronics and furniture. While the runners up are composting. Recycling of materials appears to be the habit that most in the UB Library community are involved in. And some specific ways they reuse and repurpose is saving vegetable scraps to make stock for soups, checking out materials from the public library, which in itself is a sustainable and socially equitable act. And, of course, patronizing local businesses. If you can identify with any of these sustainable habits, you too are helping to improve the environment we all share. And that's really what this is all about, collaboration and everyone doing what they can, no matter what size the effort. By fostering these habits in our own lives, we can bring the same values into the workplace and keep our Library green for all those who use it and for many years to come.

Omar Brown

We hope you enjoyed this episode of Libraries Out Loud and stay tuned for our next look at UB Libraries on campus.