

Comment

America Has a Drinking Problem Questionable Water from the Village Well



It would seem that these days, just about everyone shares Habitat for Humanity's concern for our city and our neighborhoods, especially those most affected by the foreclosure crisis, which according to both national and local media, is worse here than just about anywhere else.

As Habitat continues to work at a time when so many others cannot, we continue to bring suburban volunteers into our hardest hit neighborhoods and are creating an "Epicenter of Hope" at a time when Cleveland needs more help than ever before.

Because Habitat is celebrating the expansion of a construction material and tool recycling operation which now resides in a beautiful warehouse on West 110th, my public speaking and radio show appearances are becoming more frequent. They are also becoming increasingly radical as I begin to connect the dots relative to Cleveland's relationship to the rest of the world.

Recently, in the middle of a speech, someone finally brought me a long awaited drink of water in the form of an unopened Evian bottle. I thanked her, paused, took a long drink, and then held it up over my head and said, "Reduce/Reuse/Recycle. Buying these and then throwing the plastic away is not wasteful, it's shameful. There is no 'away', there are only large holes dug into the earth, that we wistfully and ironically call 'landfills'. It takes four liters of water to produce a one liter plastic bottle and every time you bury one in the ground, another one gets made.

"Recycling the bottle," I went on to say, "is a better idea, so please use our recycling containers as you leave. I'm going to take this one home and refill it nine or ten times before recycling, which is the 'Reuse' part of the three 'R' equation. 'Reduction', however, is where we all need to get to, and soon, because one out of every five people on earth does not have clean drinking water. Two out of every five people do not have access to basic sanitation. The resulting illnesses cause the deaths of over 5 million people each year, and they are mostly children."

I shook the bottle close to the microphone so you could hear the water sloshing about and said, "It would appear that Americans have a serious drinking problem. The World Health Organization estimates that it would take \$30 Billion dollars per year to provide safe, clean, drinking water the world over, and that is less than half of what Americans spent on bottled water last year! I highly recommend 'Reducing' by not buying any more of this 'air-in-a-can-scam'; carrying your own containers into the local coffee shops; filling old bottles with good, clean, Cleveland tap water; and then making a donation equivalent to what you typically spend on bottled water to one of the many organizations engaged in providing clean water to the developing world!"

I then took another really long drink and said, "Where was I? Oh yes, we were talking about the new ReStore and I was about to thank some of the many donors who made this move possible..."

I got a great round of applause, but I could tell that some of the folks were pretty uncomfortable and it's possible that these ever increasing tirades are enough to drive some of my colleagues to drink. That's not such a bad thing, though. There are plenty of great watering holes in Cleveland, and it sure beats rising before dawn to spend the next five hours carrying questionable water back from the village well.

From Cool Cleveland contributor Jeffrey Bowen jeffreybowenAThotmail.com

Bowen's poems have been published by Art Crimes, Cool Cleveland, Green Panda Press, Hessler Street Fair, Procrastination Press, Poet's and Writers League of Greater Cleveland, The City, The Cleveland Reader, and Whiskey Island Magazine. He directs, and writes for, Greater Cleveland Habitat for Humanity.