

ENVIRONMENTALLY SPEAKING

Peter Schwartzman

Looking for green presents?

December holidays are often represented by green icons. A glistening conifer tree, a bunch of mistletoe leaves, a ribboned wreath, and iridescent elf suits all congeal up images of winter celebrations. Yet, given the voluminous use of the almighty dollar from Thanksgiving to New Years Day, the winner of Winter's Green Award seems obvious. It is as if everything that anyone wants costs greenbacks and so everyone feels compelled to shell them out. All this spending creates a tremendous amount of excitement but, as well, a great deal of stress, especially on those less financially secure.

The thought of having to buy everyone gifts can be paralyzing. Don't panic, there is good news. There exists so many gifts that don't require too much moola. In fact, there are many things to give, that will undoubtedly save lots of green, both economically and environmentally. Hence, the real Green this winter holiday should be the recognition that going "Green" (i.e., being environmentally-conscientious in ones actions and lifestyle) is easily doable and really beneficial as well.

What if you could give someone you love/like a gift that did most of the following: (a) provide them something they can use; (b) save you money; (c) save them money; (d) make them more aware of their environment; (e) improve their health; (e) promote a healthier way of living for all of us; and, (f) support good, responsible businesses? Wouldn't it be amazing to give something that satisfies these criteria? Believe it or not, it is not all that tough to do. Below I have provided a list of such possibilities. I start with those that may cost some money and end with those that are virtually free.

For those interested in spending some money, consider these ideas for gifts:

Almost everyone goes shopping at some point during the week. Why not get your loved one a durable, reusable shopping bag. Go to reusablebags.com (email: service@reusablebags.com; phone: 1-888.707.3873) and pick out one that you like. They literally have bags of all shapes and sizes for his or her and for any occasion or function. Think of how many plastic/paper bags your giftee will save. The company also sells reusable water bottles of many varieties. Did you know that most plastic water bottles leach dangerous chemicals into the liquids they contain? Well, other varieties exist including stainless steel ones; SIGG—a manufacturer of a patented container that does leach at all—is another option. There are even bottles of various sizes and "looks" and sippy cups for the little ones. You might have read about baby bottles releasing bisphenol A—"a developmental, neural, and reproductive toxicant." Isn't a sippy cup one of the best gifts for a newborn? Get a bag and a bottle for approximately \$30. What a deal!

Since birds provide us such wonderful song and majestic flight throughout most of the year, why not give a bird house or a bird feeder. The Backyard Bird Company (backyardbird.com; phone: 941-764-5880) contains tons of different models. I even saw a huge assortment of reasonably priced feeders at Big Lots. A house or feeder will definitely bring harmonious sounds and playful activity to any backyard.

What do we nostalgically think of doing by a warm fire? Reading a good book? Well, for adults there are tons of profound environmental books just waiting to be absorbed. M. Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, P. Hawken's *Blessed Unrest*, D. Suzuki's *The Secret of Life: Redesigning the Living World or Good News for a Change*, B. Kingsolver's *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle or Prodigal Summer*, B. Commoner's *Making Peace With the Planet*, and E. Black's *Internal Combustion* would all make for an enlightening and captivating read. Be sure to put a personal inscription inside it telling the giftee why you cherish them. For younger readers, E. Schlosser's *Chew on This: Everything You Don't Want to Know About Fast Food*, B. Brenner's *One Small Place in a Tree*, and D. McLimans' *Gone Wild: An Endangered Animal Alphabet* would all be a treat as well. If a book isn't your style, then a magazine subscription works as well. A few titles to look for include: *E—The Environmental Magazine*, *Acres U.S.A.* (for the farming types), *Worldwatch*, *Extra!*, and *World Magazine* (for kids).

Did you know that one of the best ways to improve indoor air quality is to fill a house with plants? According to Ed Hume Seeds (www.humeseeds.com/purify.htm), Spider plants and flowering Chrysanthemums are among the best at cleansing the air. Much of what we know in this regard comes from research conducted by NASA. So visit the site and get a plant of one of the listed species for your friend. Turn the printout (of the link) into a greeting card for a different twist. You aren't giving them any old plant and they need to know what makes this plant special.

Give a sample of fair trade coffee, chocolate, or some similar. Wet their appetite for quality, sustainable products.



They may like these alternatives so much that they want to get them (rather than their current, less-sustainable, versions). FAIR TRADE CERTIFIED™ (www.transfairusa.org) provides tons of information on fair trade products and allows visitors to type in their location/city and find out what stores are selling fair trade items nearby. Most items in the stores are not "fair trade" and as such depend upon questionable, and often unfair and dangerous, labor practices. Every dollar spent in on fair trade items not only supports worthwhile and respectable businesses, it motivates all sectors of commerce to be more humane and responsible.

If nothing above peaks your interest then check out the *National Green Pages* which can be obtained from Co-op America (www.coopamerica.org). There will definitely be something in it that you can give and still be proud.

For those on a low budget or willing to establish a new

type of gift giving (one not predicated on spending sheets of money), consider these ideas:

- Volunteer a certain number of hours to help a friend finish a project (perhaps, to repair something on the house) or organize an event (baby shower, party, fund raiser, etc.). Scientific studies show that social engagement makes people happy not the unending accumulation of gadgets.

- Offer a certain number of back rubs, hair cuts, or foot massages.

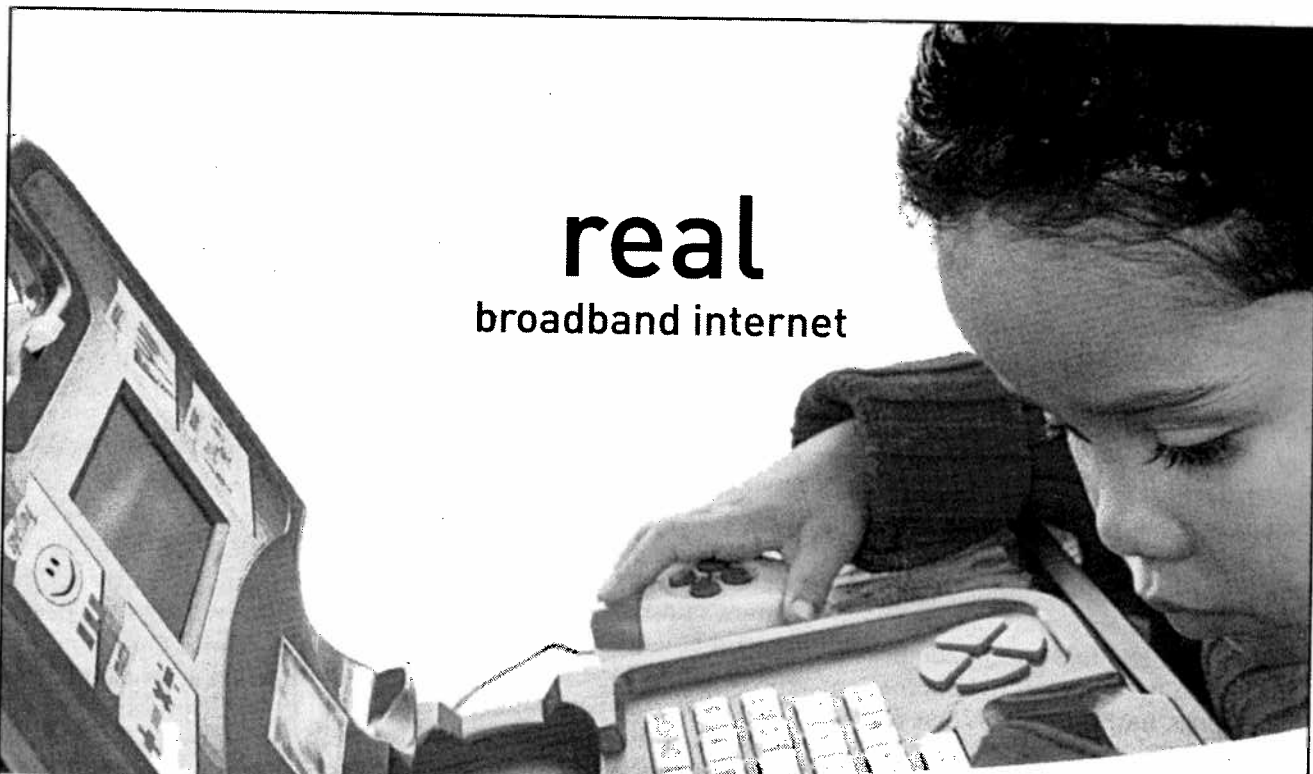
- Invite them to a labor-free (i.e., no work on their part) dinner on a designated day in the near future. Crochet/ Knit them a scarf or hat; if you don't know these skills, find someone who does and ask them to show you the basics (it isn't that difficult and it isn't unmanly either)

- Give a pair of compact-fluorescent light (CFL) bulbs (and tell them that they can think of you—and all the money you are saving them—every time they turn on the lights). Switching one incandescent bulb for a CFL bulb could save the user \$20-\$30 in costs each year. This is what my friends will get from me. Shh, it will be a surpris

- Write your loved one a song or poem; there is nothing more touching than to know that someone cares enough to spend the time and share their feelings in this way.

Consider the above suggestions and come up with your own. If you find something that works, be sure to share it with us (via a letter to the editor). Happy holidays. May all your wishes be granted and may the planet be better off on January 1, 2008 than it was at the time of this printing (in large part because of more thoughtful gift giving this season).

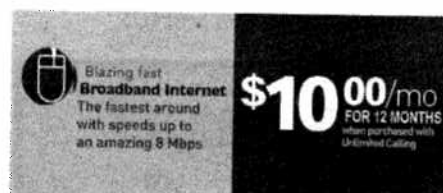
Peter Schwartzman (email: wordnerdauthor@gmail.com) is associate professor and chair of the Environmental Studies Program at Knox College. Father to two amazing girls, Peter hopes that their lives will be lived on a cleaner, more just, more environmentally-aware planet. A nationally-ranked *Scrabble*® junkie, he is also the founder and maintainer of websites dedicated to peace, empowerment, and environmental well-being: www.onehuman.org; www.blackthornhill.org; & www.chicagocleanpower.org.



real
broadband internet

Call us crazy, but we think there's no such thing
as broadband that's too fast - or too economical.

You need broadband that does what broadband is supposed to do. Like download huge files fast, stay connected, and keep you communicating. That's what you get from Gallatin River. Real broadband internet service. Real value. Keep it real.



Offer available to new residential customers only. Regular price for Unlimited Calling and Broadband is \$60.00/mo. plus tax. Price includes select calling features, such as Caller ID and Voice Mail, and fees, such as the Subscriber Line Charge. Regular price for Broadband service is \$30.00/mo. Save \$20 a month for 12 months with coupons, making the introductory Broadband price \$10.00/mo. First month's bill may be higher due to partial month charges. Prices subject to change. Unlimited Calling is for direct-dialed voice calls from home to anywhere in the continental U.S. Operator-assisted and 900 calls not included. Other terms and conditions apply. Broadband available in most locations.