Edgewater committee working to achieve dramatic ecological goals

By CRYSTAL FENCKE

The calendar says that the season is spring, even though the snowfall last week seemed to disagree. To be sure, with Earth Day fast approaching, this is the perfect time to start thinking about “green” initiatives, and Uncommon Ground restaurant in Rogers Park would be an excellent place to start.

On Thursday, April 9, at 6 p.m. to 8 p.m., the location at 1401 W. Devon Ave. offers its free monthly green room session “eco-mixer,” a place to enjoy complimentary appetizers and listen to experts dish out gardening and ecological advice. This time it will host speakers from the Edgewater Community Council who will present the Edgewater Environmental Plan, a detailed approach for neighbors to connect with one another to work toward environmental change. As members of the committee, Uncommon Ground owners Helen and Michael Cameron will also talk about the cutting-edge eatery’s many growing goals.

The Council, which marks its 50th anniversary in 2010, is looking to make Edgewater “the model green and sustainable community in the city,” said Anne Comeau, co-chair of the Edgewater Beautiful Committee, part of the ECC which encourages practical community beautification efforts through environmentally sound practices.

“We’re looking to make it a LEED N.D. certified neighborhood,” said Comeau. LEED N.D. is a rating for neighborhood design which will be launched this summer, according to the U.S. Green Building Council Web site. “LEED for Neighborhood Development emphasizes the creation of compact, walkable, vibrant, mixed-use neighborhoods with good connections to nearby communities.”

A committee of experts is shopping a plan for the more than 60,000-person area between Foster Avenue on the south, Devon Avenue on the north, Lake Michigan on the east and Ravenswood Avenue on the west that aims for change and action, reads its presentation found at www.edgewater2020.org.

Among ten points of focus are alternative energy, cleaning the neighborhood and education and public awareness. It also highlights developing sustainable public schools and saving time and money by using local stores for shopping.

On March 12, Emmanuel Church, 5959 N. Sheridan Road, hosted a roll-out in which about 175 residents came to find out how they could get involved, said Comeau. “We did get quite a few people interested in energy efficient homes and transportation. ‘We’d like to work on parks,’ other people said. We were very encouraged about that,” said. Comeau.

Cameau said that it’s a very large and complicated project, especially for an old Chicago neighborhood. But she also thinks that once the group gets the word out about how energy efficiency can save money, more and more people will pay attention.

The Camerons are the creative force behind both Uncommon Ground locations, including the first, popular spot at 3800 N. Clark St. in Wrigleyville. On Thursday people can also learn about the first certified organic rooftop farm in the country, cited by MOSA, the Midwest Organic Services Association.

The owners encourage interested Chicagoans to find out how they can help in the farm and learn a few things in the process. The 4,000 sq. ft. structure provides almost 1/4 acre of room to grow crops, said Helen.

A farm on the roof not only decreases pollutants for the neighborhood, but all the food produced will be used in the restaurant, she said. Among the top crops expected to grace diners’ plates soon will be tomatoes, especially exotic heirloom varieties. Also look to find peas, beans, cucumbers and different greens. “The goal is as much amazingly fresh food as possible,” said Helen.

In addition, during May through October on “Farmer Fridays,” Uncommon Grounds’ organic Farmer’s Market in the parking lot at Devon every Friday 4-8 p.m., offers produce from Harvest Moon Organic Farm, a local grower with whom the restaurateurs partner.

In addition, five solar-thermal panels help heat the restaurants water. Not stopping with the restaurant, the Camerons also donate the kitchen’s used fryer oil to the Loyola University Bio-Diesel program.