

Group encourages environmental awareness

By PAM MARTIN

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It just takes a little effort. Changing a furnace filter monthly. Setting the hot water heater temperature at 120 degrees. Taking a five-minute shower, not a bath.

"If everyone did their little part, we could reverse the dire situation within 10 years," said Sister Jolene Geier.

The "situation" Sister Geier is referring to is global warming, an issue she and several others in Barton and Pawnee counties have chosen to focus their efforts on as part of an informal group, the Grass Roots Environmental Action Team,

formed to draw attention to environmental issues. On Monday, the group will host a presentation on "Energy Efficient Housing" given by Larned contractor and architect Tim Schaller. The event begins at 7 p.m. at Bergthal Mennonite Church, 110 S. Ave., three miles north of Pawnee Rock.

In September, GREAT hosted a Climate Crisis Workshop, in conjunction with the Dominican Sisters of Great Bend, bringing two presenters, Leigh Smith and Ruth Siress, to the area. Sister Geier's connection with Siress, a cousin, prompted the workshops.

The two women were among 1,000 people chosen nationwide

for special training in presenting information about global warming. Sister Geier said. Each person had to commit to present workshops, which are provided at no charge. Hosting groups cover lodging and mileage costs.

The women conducted workshops for the public, a workshop at Barton County Community College, six one-hour workshops at Great Bend High School for about 450 students, and a two-hour workshop for Larned Middle School students, who had watched the Al Gore

Energy saving tips

- Add foam gaskets behind all outlet covers and switch plates and use safety plugs in all unused outlets to prevent outside air leakage into the louse.

- Fix leaky faucets. One drop per second can add up to 165 gallons per month — more than one person uses in two weeks.

- Use lids on pots and pans to reduce cooking times.

- Clean the lint screen on the clothes dryer with every use. A clogged lint screen can use up to 30 percent more energy and can be a fire hazard.

- Switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs. They use 75 percent less energy than normal incandescents.

- Keep lamps away from thermostats. The heat can cause the furnace to run less than needed and the air conditioner more than needed.

- Use a clothesline to dry clothing outside.

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film "An Inconvenient Truth" about global warming in preparation.

It was that same movie that galvanized the group into action. Several people met at Bergthal Mennonite Church to watch an early preview of the movie in October 2006, Sister Geier said.

"From that, we said, 'do we want to stay connected and do thing?'" she said.

They did and the group was formed. GREAT's first event coincided with Earth Day 2007, when they showed several films for educational purposes and discussion.

GREAT distributed several books on global warming and climate change to schools and

libraries they received free of charge from former Vice President Gore's organization. They also provided lists of simple things everyone could do to reduce energy use at home and work. Not only do many of the suggestions save energy, they save money, Geier noted.

Installing a water-saving shower head can save \$250 per year, according to information distributed by the group. Unplugging electrical devices such as computers and televisions when not in use can save electricity. They continue to draw power when not in use.

"They kept saying (to the kids), "recycle, recycle, recycle," Geier said.

Great Bend is fortunate to have a good recycling facility,

she said. Some of the energy-saving steps do take more time and effort, however, such as unplugging appliances every day.

"It does take a lot of willpower for us to make the changes," Geier said, "but it's worth spending the time and money on it."

At this point, the informal organization has about a dozen committed members, who plan to continue offering educational events. Their next event will correspond with Earth Day 2008. For more information about the group, contact Geier at 792-1232 or check GREAT's Web site, www.midks.com/great. Normal meeting time is the last Monday of the month at Bergthal Mennonite Church.