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Photo by Tracy Dreslinski
 Shirley Bavonese, founder of the Sierra Club Green Cruise, waves a flag in honor of Earth Day along West Nine Mile Road in downtown Ferndale during a Green Tour of the city April 22.

Ferndale Green Tour spotlights city's environmental efforts

By Jeremy Selweski
 C & G Staff Writer

FERNDALE — In honor of Earth Day, Ferndale's The Night Move biodiesel bus made a rare daytime appearance.

As the vehicle behind a Green Tour through the city on April 22, The Night Move — which typically carries partygoers to and from popular destinations in Detroit, Ferndale and Royal Oak on weekend nights — provided the fuel for one of the centerpieces of Ferndale Green Week, a citywide celebration of environmentally friendly practices that encourages all residents to “think green.”

Mayor Craig Covey, City Manager Bob Bruner and Doug Christie — a Green Week organizer, as well as a member of the Ferndale Environmental Impact Commission — hosted the guided tour, highlighting prominent city locations where steps have been taken to reduce Ferndale's carbon footprint.

“Ferndale is a city making great efforts to be greener,” Covey said minutes before the tour got under way. “I think we have to leave a legacy, and we should leave the Earth nicer for future generations.”

Jessica Danley of Livonia, the reigning holder of the Miss Earth Michigan crown, was also onboard the bus to take in the sights of Ferndale. She was excited to be taking her first ride in a biodiesel vehicle.

“The more people that are thinking green, the better,” she said. “It really starts with individuals in smaller cities like this. If everyone steps on board locally, then we can start to make an impact globally.”

Many of the locations visited on the bus tour were sites of Ferndale Green Week activities. In Openheim Park, there was a special tree-planting ceremony on Arbor Day, April 24. Behind the Woodward Avenue Brewers restaurant, 22646 Woodward

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Ave., on April 25, residents could receive a free spring checkup for their bike. The flower shop Blumz by JR Designs, 503 E. Nine Mile Road, was the site of a recycled arts and crafts event that same day, while the Good Neighbors Garden in Oak Park served as the home of Ferndale's Garden Day. Meanwhile, at Ferndale High School, 881 Pinecrest Drive, vegetarians and vegans could take part in the annual VegFest on April 26.

According to Shirley Bavonese, founder of the Sierra Club Green Cruise, "There's more energy this year for Green Week than I've ever seen (in Ferndale)."

There were also stops at John F. Kennedy School and Ferndale Middle School, which on April 20 were officially certified as Michigan Green Schools; Schiffer Park, located at the corner of West Nine Mile Road and Planavon Street, which is the site of the 2009 Green Cruise this August; and various downtown businesses — including AJ's Café, The Pinwheel Bakery, Via Nove and The Twisted Shamrock — that have made efforts to be more environmentally friendly.

At a storage yard near Ferndale Middle School where residents often come to get free compost, Bruner explained, "The lumber company here will take trees that have been cut down and mill them into new wood. It's a great way to reuse and reclaim local wood into useable lumber. Otherwise, the city would have to pay to bring all that wood to a landfill."

Covey pointed out that Ferndale will plant more trees than ever in 2009. "The city plants about 50 trees every year, but this year we're going to double that to 100," he said.

While touring the downtown area of Nine Mile and Woodward, he shifted his focus to some of the city's latest building projects. He said the city is looking to achieve "silver" certification or better in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for all of its new and renovated municipal buildings, including the upcoming expansion of the Ferndale Public Library and the planned construction of a new Ferndale 43rd District Court.

"It's almost always more environmentally friendly to renovate than it is to tear down and start over," Covey remarked, citing as an example the conversion last year of an old schoolhouse at 131 E. Nine Mile Road into the new Detroit-area offices of the law firm Foley & Mansfield. "Rather than tearing the whole thing down, we have a gorgeous, totally redone building that keeps that character of the early 1900s."

As the tour ended, Bruner expressed pride that the themes and messages of Green Week have been embraced so fully by the people of Ferndale.

"I'm glad that local residents and businesses feel strongly about sustainability and participating in and supporting this event," he said. "All the little things we try do for the environment, they really add up."

Added Covey, "This has been hugely educational for me and has motivated me to try to do more. It really shows how much you can do to be more green. If every city did some of these things, it would save an incredible amount of energy and fuel."

For Christie, the tour underscored how through its recent efforts, the city is taking the necessary steps toward long-term environmental sustainability. "Ferndale continues to progress ahead of the green curve," he said. "We're just trying to show people that all of these things are happening right in your backyard, if you just take a little extra time to notice."

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