

Celebrating Earth Day

April 22, 1970, was the first Earth Day celebration in the United States. Occurring a year after a massive oil spill in Santa Barbara, California, the organizers of the first Earth Day also cited Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, published in 1962, as the impetus to focus awareness on air and water pollution, the loss of wilderness, and the extinction of wildlife.

U. S. Senator Gaylord Nelson, a Wisconsin environmentalist, is credited with beginning the annual celebrations that continue to this day. Inspired by the student anti-war protests of the 1960s, he sought to capture that same zeal and action for the protection of the environment. To that end, the first Earth Day events took place on college campuses with twenty million people participating, the largest secular day of protest in the world. Later that year, Congress passed the Clean Air Act of 1970, establishing the Environmental Protection Agency. The 1970s also saw the enactment of other national environmental laws such as the Clean Water Acts, National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Environmental Education Act, and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

April 22, a Wednesday in 1970, was only one day but some local groups chose to celebrate the environment with a whole week of activities. "Earth Week in Monroe County" included conferences, lectures, and workshops all over the community. The Rochester Museum and Science Center focused on visual and physical pollution. At the college level, Monroe Community College formed S.T.E.P., Students To End Pollution, and created lectures and films about the subject. Rochester Institute of Technology held a day of lectures on pollution, the New York State Clean Waters program, and the effects of chemicals in the environment on the human body. St. John Fisher College students picketed at Rochester's Emerson Street landfill.

At the secondary school level, Harley School held a hike at Mendon Ponds park at 5:30 in the morning followed by a day of lectures. Allendale School held an assembly on the topic. Brighton High School also held an assembly with speakers from the Monroe County Conservation Commission and the Monroe County Pure Waters Commission followed by a discussion led by the BHS Science department.

Begun by college students, the annual Earth Day commemorations have become community celebrations in April and throughout the year. In the town of Brighton, this takes many forms. The town of Brighton holds spring and fall document shredding and technology recycling days. The Brighton Police Department collects pharmaceuticals for safe disposal. The tree nursery at Buckland Park insures that replacement trees will be available when a mature tree in the town's right-of-way must be taken down. Since 2002, Brighton has been a Tree City USA, indicating its commitment to maintaining an urban forest.

Supervisor Sandra Frankel established the Green Brighton Task Force out of which came the Color Brighton Green organization that promotes education and action focused on reducing human impact on the global climate. Another part of the Color Brighton Green initiative, founded in 2008, is the Brighton Farmers' Market held every Sunday all year long. The Market features vendors who grow food in an environmentally sound manner. At the Brighton High School parking lot for many years, this summer the market will be located at the Golisano Institute, 150 Sawgrass Drive, across from the Brighton town offices at Empire State University on Westfall Road.

Fifty-six years later, Brighton continues its commitment to the environment. Clean Sweep, held every spring, will be seeking volunteers soon.

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