

## LONG ISLAND / NASSAU

# LI teens learn tips to tackle climate change at summit

A scientist tells eighth- to 12th-graders that they “are going to have the opportunity to make transformative change” at the Saturday workshop in the Port Washington Public Library.



John-Michael Kostallas, who owns Kostal Paddle in Port Washington, speaks at a session on water issues at the Youth Climate Summit in the Port Washington Public Library on Saturday. Photo Credit: Barry Sloan

**By Joan Gralla**

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Updated April 28, 2018 9:37 PM

The formidable task of beating back climate change must be tackled by teenagers who are still in school — and their communities — as global accords falter, a scientist told students on Saturday.

“What a time to have landed on Earth. But you are going to have the opportunity to make transformative change,” John Michael Byrne told eighth- to 12th-graders attending Port Washington’s Youth Climate Summit.

“The only way we will make significant progress is if we all pitch in,” said Byrne, a member of the United Nations climate change panel awarded the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize.

The United States exited the Kyoto Protocol, which mandated cuts in greenhouse gases, and the Paris Agreement, though it was voluntary pact, he said.

So Byrne, president of the nonprofit Foundation for Renewable Energy & Environment, now focuses on communities.

New York City, London and Tokyo all are curbing planet-warming gases faster than their countries, he said.

Boulder, Colorado; San Francisco; and Boston also are outpacing the United States, he said.

“While the whole international effort failed us, it has been remarkable how sub-nations lead,” he told about

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One organizer of the event, held at the Port Washington Public Library, asked students to devise a one-year “fun” green project after attending workshops on waste, food, water and green jobs.

Mindy Germain, executive director of Residents Forward, a local improvement group, stressed how much time they put in was up to them. And experts at the workshop would help them, she

said.

At the water workshop, Cameron Helman, 18, and Daniele Diruggiero, 17, of Port Washington, heard John-Michael Kostallas, who owns Kostal Paddle in Port Washington, narrate a video shot on the Pacific’s Midway Island, where plastic refuse is lethal.

“Right now, the mother bird is feeding the baby bird plastic, who maybe gets to survive a month or two. This is all because of us,” he said.

Helman and Diruggiero said their last summer before starting college would include the cleanup and wetland planting work they already had undertaken.

“I definitely want to do as much as I can this summer,” Helman said.

To Diruggiero, one of the event’s most notable features was the presence of so many eighth-graders. “They’re really spreading the education through the community.”

At this workshop, two executive directors, Sarah Deonarine, Manhasset Bay Protection Committee, and Eric Swenson, Hempstead Harbor Protection Committee, also reviewed what polluted local waters, how far cleanup efforts have advanced, and what still must be done.

The lack of North Shore sewers remains a huge hindrance, they said.

Possible projects range from putting concrete domes or oyster homes into the bay, installing devices on docks that automatically suction up trash — and simply emptying harbor side bins before the wind blows “throwaways” into the water.

After attending the career workshop, Jacob Keller, 16, of Port Washington, appreciated the breadth of the

“It was great to get the full picture on the issues.”

He wasn't daunted by the burdens being thrust on his generation. “I see it as a good opportunity to be part of the cycle of just stopping it,” Keller said.

Citing recent efforts in gun control, he added: “Whether you agree with it or not, our generation can make change.”

**By Joan Gralla**

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