

Featured in the Newark Post

## Going green over drinks

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Monthly social group discusses eco issues  
By CHRISTINE NEFF

Much has changed in the 25 years since John and Lori Lake have been involved in "green" issues.

In the early 1980s, when the couple renovated their first home using environmentally friendly practices, they dealt with an unexpected visit from the local police department, investigating a neighbor's suspicion that the solar panels on their roof were spy cameras.

John Lake can laugh now at how apprehensive and uneducated people were then about environmental issues.

And, he's encouraged by how far they've come, especially when he sees 20 or so persons gather for a meeting of Green Drinks, a social network for eco-minded people held in the Newark area. "This has been a long time coming," said Lake this past Tuesday night, smiling, as he looked over the crowd.

The Newark chapter of Green Drinks is part of an international organization that started nearly 20 years ago in London and has since spread to more than 300 cities around the world. The Lakes started the local meeting in October 2007. The crowd quickly outgrew their first meeting space, and the group now mingles at TGIFriday's on S. College Avenue the first Tuesday of every month from 6:30 to 8 p.m.

"It's a great group of people," said Lori Lake. Homeowners, wellness professionals, University of Delaware students and professors and businesspeople involved in green industries all attend the informal gathering.

No formal presentations are given, but conversations cover a range of topics, from how to reduce energy costs to how to incorporate green elements in home renovation.

"When I found out this group had finally come to Delaware, I was quite excited," said Julie Panaro, who, with her husband, owns a construction company, Panaro Construction Inc.

She called the meeting a "great opportunity to network" and a way to exchange ideas with homeowners about products, such as geothermal heat and low VOC paints. "Every budget has room in it for green choices," she said.

Five years ago, Jim Kelly of the Newark-based KW Solar Solutions would have never imagined a gathering like this. When he and his business partner started their company, he said, they thought it would be "a nice part-time thing."

Then, they did a solar installation once every two to three weeks. Now, they're completing two to three projects a week and get five phone calls and a few Web site inquiries a day from people interested in their services.

"It's so mainstream now," he said. "When we started, people had no idea. Now, it's kind of the cool thing to do."

In recent years, this interest in green issues has gone beyond personal efforts into the public sphere. Newark City Council has taken steps to increase the awareness and availability of green building to residents.

Newark homeowners now qualify for state of Delaware rebates pertaining to alternative energy, and last week city council passed changes to the zoning code to establish a LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) energy conservation program for commercial buildings.

Even with this growing interest, John Lake knows he and his wife, who have dedicated their lives to sharing their knowledge, still have a long road to travel. "The fear is still there," he said, "but now there is a desire for education."

For more information about Green Drinks, visit [www.GreenDelaware.com](http://www.GreenDelaware.com).

