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DINNER AND DRINKS LEADS LEAVES SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR HIGH AND DRY

When Capilano University geography instructor Jeanne Mikita was asked to go for dinner and drinks by two strangers, she never imagined it would leave her dangling from a clothesline.

After attending a Cool North Shore Climate Change Café with her students, Mikita was approached by organizers Charles Holmes and David Thomson to be a presenter for future events. “Cool Drinks and the Climate Change Café are both part of Charles’ and David’s initiative to get people together socially to talk about how they can stop global warming in their lives right now,” Mikita explains. “They share stories about successes and failures, and support each other in reaching goals. I’m there to offer info about reducing our carbon emissions, and motivate people to take action.”

But Mikita, an environmentalist “since I was a kid living on Victoria St”, was inspired to take action herself. “I went home thinking, ‘How can I help other people reduce their carbon output?’ When I asked my husband that night for the umpteenth time when he was going to put up our clothesline it hit me. I’m going to start a clothesline installation company.” The result was Sundog Clothesline Company. Mikita will launch her new business at the EPIC Sustainable Living Expo in the new Vancouver convention centre May 8-10.

For the past few months Mikita says it’s been a blur of tracking down suppliers and innovative new products to meet the challenging Vancouver weather, considered anything but clothesline friendly by most people. She’s tested them all as well. “Instead of one clothesline, my husband has installed about a dozen in our back yard, under our porch and in our basement. “ She’s particularly fond of the innovative Australian designs, some of which come with covers, and some of the flexible indoor models.

Mikita notes that gas or electric dryers can account for up to 10% of a household’s energy bill. “The advantages of using a clothesline instead of a dryer are numerous. Clothes last longer, stains aren’t set permanent by the heat, there’s less ironing. You can pay for the clothesline in a year on the money saved on your gas or electric bill, and you reduce your annual carbon footprint by between 350 and 850 pounds depending on the age of your dryer.”

Mikita’s business plan includes carbon offset purchases for the delivery of the products, as well as 5 percent of profits going to organizations focusing on climate change.

She’s buoyed by the recent trend across North America, including Vancouver, that has seen municipalities legalize clotheslines again. “Some of those laws were archaic. Everywhere else in the world clotheslines are just part of life. It’s heartening to see clotheslines are finally becoming hip here in North America.”

She’s offering the option of installation because of her own experience. “We bought our clothesline over a year ago and it just sat in the basement. Sometimes getting the clothesline up is the hardest part.”

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