

Dennis Smith, SPECIAL TO BURLINGTON POST | May 12, 2010 - 12:33 PM | 1

Eco-friendlier homes possible

Famed contractor Mike Holmes plans to continue crusading for environmentally-friendlier homes.

"I am going to keep doing this and I am going to keep making changes," said the star of HGTV shows like Holmes on Homes.

Holmes and columnist Jeffrey Simpson were keynote speakers at Burlington's first climate change summit, held at the Royal Botanical Gardens last Thursday (May 6).

Holmes spoke about the environmentally-friendly blue wood coating used for building on the Holmes in New Orleans show.

"It's water resistant, mould resistant, termite resistant and fire resistant," he said. "Shouldn't developers catch on to this?"

Holmes said a thermal break is important to prevent condensation and mould. If only a minimum building code is met, mould can occur, he said. The Wind Walk community he's developing in Alberta consists of sustainable homes using eco-friendly measures like recycling grey water.

"If I do a community, I can find the best builders in the area and oversee it," said Holmes. His homes will cost the same as other builders', he added.

Holmes was a Canadian government climate change adviser at the recent global climate change summit in Copenhagen. He believes global warming will worsen and expressed concern about what he calls the planet's most valuable resource — water.

"We're stealing from the water supply for money and money runs the world," said Holmes. "If we forget what we're doing, there will be huge problems."

He noted Australia has a huge water shortage, while Los Angeles and Arizona get water from a 1,000-mile pipeline. Holmes is also concerned that federal tax credits for energy efficiency and home renovations have ended.

"No one wants to pay the HST (Harmonized Sales Tax)," he said. "This is a step backward on green initiatives."

He predicts a black market, where people pay contractors in cash to avoid taxes.

Globe and Mail columnist Simpson told participants to re-double their efforts on the climate change issue.

"Don't be discouraged because it's hard," he said. "Everything that's worthwhile doing in politics is hard."

The national affairs columnist noted previous achievements like eliminating the federal deficit were originally



Eco-friendlier homes possible. CLIMATE CHANGE SUMMIT: Mike Holmes, from HGTV's Holmes on Homes, was one of the keynote speakers at last week's Take Action Burlington climate change summit. *Eric Riehl – Burlington Post*

considered impossible.

Don't give up because of the federal government's inaction, he added.

The speaker praised Burlington's efforts. "I'm bowled over that you have an idling bylaw."

Simpson said Prime Minister Stephen Harper rarely gives speeches about climate change.

"He always speaks about it as a downer, that facing climate change means big costs and will be extremely difficult."

Following Americans on the issue will likely lead to inaction, said the speaker, who co-authored Hot Air: Meeting Canada's Climate Change Challenge.

"We have the worst climate change record in the world," noted Simpson. "Our emissions are up more since 1990 than any other country in the world."

He said reducing carbon dioxide emissions 20 per cent by 2020 is an impossible target for Canada because Alberta is projecting a 14 per cent increase. Simpson feels Canada needs to tax carbon or put a price on it. 'Cap and trade' enables those over their carbon emission caps to buy from those under the caps.

"My long-term view is they'll try a cap and trade system, but find it messy and go for the tax instead," he said.

Climate change is a long-term issue, said Simpson. "It's challenging to get people to understand that action today is highly necessary to avoid more serious problems down the road."

He dismissed hoax theories. "The earth is warming up at an accelerated pace and we need to reverse the trend line."

Displays and speaker panels on topics related to energy and healthy communities were also part of the Take Action Burlington summit.

