

# VPA's Saylor and Morris deepen understanding of climate change, promote global sustainability through Canary Project

Wednesday, November 24, 2010, *By News Staff*

In 2006, Susannah Saylor and Edward Morris, both current faculty members in Syracuse University's College of Visual and Performing Arts, set out to create an initiative that would use photography as a medium to illustrate landscapes throughout the world where scientists are studying the impacts of climate change. It didn't take long, however, before collaborators in arts, design and education joined in the effort, creating the diverse collective that today is the Canary Project. Since its founding, the Canary Project has produced art and media projects involving more than 30 artists, scientists, writers, designers and educators internationally, all deepening the global understanding of climate change.

This week, in 12 locations around the world, thousands of people will gather to create images large enough to be visible from space and to be photographed by satellite. The Canary Project is designing one of these aerial images in the Cape Flats area in Cape Town, South Africa, to visualize and promote sustainability. At the Cape Flats event, approximately 1,000 people will sit down to a group meal cooked entirely by solar cookers. Working in collaboration with Bill McKibbin's 350.org, the solar cookers will be arrayed in a semi-circle shape and the participants will sit on 20 banner-like "blankets" that emanate out from the solar cookers. The solar cookers and banners form the shape of a rising sun and its rays, providing a sun-shaped image photographable by satellite.

The solar cookers used in the event will be donated to local schools and nongovernmental organizations in the area, helping to transition the low-income community into a more sustainable way of cooking. In the Cape Flats area, many residents do not have access to electricity, and those who do generally can only afford the government's free basic allowance of 50 kilowatts per month, which seldom lasts more than a couple of weeks. The rest of the month, households without the financial resources to obtain more energy revert to cooking with paraffin and/or scraps of wood or other flammable and carbon-intensive materials. Therefore, the more solar cookers that can be provided to Cape Flats residents, the more people will be empowered with access to these carbon- and cost-free means of cooking meals.

The Canary Project and 350.org are partnering with NGOs to train Cape Flats community members in solar cooking and provide follow-up for the recipients to ensure the solar cookers are integrated and used in the community. The trainers will then follow up with beneficiaries two

months after they receive their cookers to ensure people have the necessary information and confidence to utilize them effectively.

According to Saylor, the project has multiple layers of intent, meaning and impact. First and foremost, the project seeks to get valuable and carbon-free cooking tools to people who need them. The Canary Project was chosen by 350.org to conceptualize the solar cooker event, and also create and transmit the powerful message of global sustainability. The Canary Project chose to focus on reflectivity, using the sustainable solar cookers and the sun to produce the satellite image.

And on the day of the satellite climate art image, transportation will be arranged for the staff and children of the beneficiary pre-schools and centers to participate in creating the image. This will be an additional opportunity to raise awareness, and neighboring communities will be invited to attend.

Saylor, assistant professor of art, design and transmedia in VPA, and Morris have also involved SU students to the international work of the Canary Project. Aviva Oskow, a sophomore communication design major in VPA, has worked with the organization as an intern and helped tell its story through graphic design projects. As part of the event, Oskow designed the materials used on the ground to promote the event to Cape Flats residents.

And earlier this year as part of the Canary Project, 46 SU students joined Saylor and Morris on a tour of an Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency facility to see for themselves where things go when we throw them “away.” They brought that reality back with them through “There is no AWAY,” an intensive, three-day, multidisciplinary charrette facilitated by COLAB, the true definition of broad collaboration, during which they brainstormed and modeled creative strategies to promote “green” habits among their peers and enlist support for SU’s Climate Action Plan.

For full details on the Cape Flats project, visit <http://earth.350.org/locations/cape-town>. For more information on the Canary Project, visit <http://canary-project.org/>.