

OCCUPASSION: SFU ecopreneur campaigns for green living

by Darlene West



As a professor of sustainable entrepreneurship at Simon Fraser University, Dr. Boyd Cohen teaches aspiring business leaders about venture opportunities in green energy, green

building, and green travel — about how companies can contribute to a sustainable world. But Cohen doesn't just teach sustainability, he lives it. And he's out to help millions of other people do the same, through his website — 3rdwhale.com — which promotes eco-courses and green jobs, not to mention green dining and green dating.

Cohen, who joined SFU in 2006, owns a hybrid vehicle (although he rarely drives it since he usually cycles or takes public transit) and pays to offset the carbon emissions of his air travel. He buys local produce and shuns plastic bags. The 37-year-old professor, who has three business degrees from Miami University in Ohio, a Master's from the University of South Carolina, and a PhD. from the University of Colorado, credits Paul Hawken's book, *Natural Capitalism*, with inspiring him to combine his background in business with his convictions about the environment. (Published in 2000, *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution*, by Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins and Hunter Lovins, described a business model in which economic and environmental interests overlap.)



Cohen's ecopreneurial success stories include Recollective, a green building consulting firm, and Visible Strategies, which developed software for tracking progress toward meeting corporate strategic goals. His newest venture is 3rdwhale.com: "a movement and a website dedicated to inspiring and enabling collaboration to change the world."

To that end, the website encourages green travel, green shopping, green jobs, even green dating. (Cohen met his wife through a conventional online dating service, an experience that convinced him of the need for a matchmaking site tailored specifically to people with shared environmental ethics.)

Beyond delivering green news and information," Cohen wants to create *the* social networking site for sustainable living, the go-to place for people researching job prospects with environmentally friendly companies, for instance, or looking for ways to make their own jobs more ecofriendly. He hopes to attract millions of users. "My ultimate goal is to become the preeminent site for sustainability."

Social entrepreneurs: Making a living while making a difference

Earlier this year, Entrepreneur Magazine published an inventory of 25 "influences" — people, trends, and events that businesses can't afford to ignore in 2008. "These are essential," the Irvine, California-based magazine said, "the forces you must take into account now so your business can reach full strength." Appearing on the list, alongside climate change, the U.S. presidential elections, Bill Gates, and oil dependence, was Bill Drayton, founder of [Ashoka](http://Ashoka.org), an international association of social entrepreneurs.

Social entrepreneurs are people with innovative solutions to social problems. They're working locally, but thinking globally and making changes on a grand scale. Ashoka identifies and invests in social entrepreneurs to help them make an impact. Established in 1981, it's financed by individuals, foundations, and business entrepreneurs, and supports more than 2,000 projects in 60 countries.

The "citizen sector," Ashoka reports, is growing at an unprecedented rate and reorganizing the way the work of society gets done.

Dr. Boyd Cohen, founder of the sustainability website 3rdwhale.com, says citizens are increasingly willing to get involved in solving global problems because they're witnessing the evidence of climate change and environmental destruction and feeling the impact of higher fuel and food prices. "We're seeing a level of awareness that the world has never seen, partly because of the Internet, and partly because, in many areas, we're starting to hit the breaking point."

The site has profiled numerous other organizations with equally high ambitions. The non-profit Net Impact wants to make a positive impact on society with a community of new leaders who use business to improve the world. Global Agents for Change, a group of young professionals and students from Vancouver, is fighting poverty. "Our goal is no less than to change the world." These visionaries are part of a wave of changemakers or "social entrepreneurs," who are tackling society's most pressing problems with creativity, compassion, and drive.

Cohen, meanwhile, has launched a campaign to celebrate environmentally savvy leaders. His contest to find the greenest person on the planet attracted local and international media interest not to mention 600 entries from 25 countries. The winner, chosen by voters on 3rdwhale.com: Matthias Gelber, a German entrepreneur who works in the green building industry in Malaysia and gives talks on how companies can make their operations more planet-friendly. Along with bragging rights, the 41-year-old environmental engineer won a pod of beluga whales (adopted in his name) and plenty of publicity for his pet charity, the Plant-A-Tree-Today Foundation, which works to combat climate change and runs a program for offsetting carbon emissions. The only Canadian to make it to the top five in the contest wound up in second place. Emily Jubenvill, who "guerilla" gardens, walks or cycles everywhere, and works for a bioenergy company in Vancouver, was named the greenest person in Canada.

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3rdwhale.com

What's next? Cohen is busy revamping 3rdwhale.com to reflect feedback on the initial release. And he's introduced a service to help people stay green on the go. The new feature, called Luna, is a location-based mobile phone application that allows users to find and rate eco-friendly eateries, stores, hotels, and other businesses at home or on the road. The initial application was developed for the iPhone, but 3rdwhale also plans to introduce versions for other smart phones. Green businesses can register with Luna for free or pay \$50 a year for a premium package that includes their company logo, 3rdwhale's "green rating," and other extras.

Cohen is testing Luna in Vancouver but plans to expand it nationally and internationally: "We have about 60 cities in our database and we plan to get to 1000 cities by December 2009." For more information contact Cohen at boyd@3rdwhale.com.

Darlene West is a freelance writer and guidebook author based in Oliver, BC. Her travel stories have appeared in regional and national magazines in both Canada and the US, and she has written hundreds of articles and reports for corporate and industry clients.