

Local duo helping to change the world

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With the conclusion of the Paris talks, the political will for change has been established.

We are now left to question what it is that our country and province can do to meet the emission standards. As it turns out, two men on Bowen have part of the answer.

Ian Thomson and Doug Hooper got talking about how they could create a business that would make a positive impact on the environment. Hooper was keenly interested in cleaning up the urban air shed and Thomson had already made a foray into cleaner energy.

It was 12 years ago that Thomson wanted to find a solution for cleaner air. He saw that Europe was using bio-fuel, as was the U.S, however little was happening in Canada. He looked at the possibility of helping to shift the transport industry in Canada toward cleaner technology.

The two had a conversation at La Mangerie in 2002 that would be pivotal in the world of clean energy in Canada. "How can we make this happen?" led the topic of their discussion.

"At the time there was one biodiesel plant in Montreal, and there were new opportunities for struggling farms to engage in clean technology development," says Hooper. In their conversation Hooper says that it was clear that to make their vision work, to help reduce carbon emissions they had to "make it our commitment, not something we do on the side."

Hooper says that "switching the transport industry to bio-diesel seemed a logical step toward cleaner air."

The challenges in bringing about change to the fuel industry were huge. In part, there were supply issues but there was yet to be enough demand to drive supply.

"It was a classic chicken and egg dilemma," says Thomson. The men decided to import the fuel and sell it while simultaneously working with policy-makers in Ottawa to help open the market to alternatives to petroleum.

"Policy has traditionally been controlled by the petroleum industry. The industry has been around, with all its infrastructure, for a hundred years."

Thomson and Hooper formed a company, The Waterfall Group, with a third partner, Fred Ghatala, to gather all the data needed to help industry leaders, governments and non-governmental organization to drive change. While non-governmental organizations, like many that spoke up in Paris, have "big-picture thinking, we bring Canadian technology and data and share knowledge of how regulations work," to help negotiate for change. "We spend time looking at the nitty gritty," says Thomson.

Hooper adds: "it has to be methodical" and says that all around, transformation is happening.

Hooper says that the fuel industry is seeing changes every



Bowen Island residents Doug Hooper (left), and Ian Thomson (right) created a company to work towards switching the transport industry to bio-diesel and make lasting change in the fuel industry. photos Louise Loik

day. "It's unprecedented. We are moving in to a new world." He says that we will be "stuck with gas and diesel engines for decades, but climate change can't wait."

Hooper and Thomson are kindred spirits. Thomson, with a strong affinity for the outdoors, spends what free time he has on outdoor adventures with his family that can involve anything from kayaking to rock climbing. He also volunteers with schools and neighbourhood organizations. He's someone who is always busy but always willing to take on a new task. Hooper, too, is always on the go as a hockey parent and with community groups.

What most people probably don't know, is that because of the work of these two men from Bowen, cars that fuel up at a regular gas station are now getting five per cent bio-fuel in their tanks. Bio-fuel technology is continuing to improve and has the potential to make up 50 per cent of the fuel going into your car if you haven't already switched to electric.

Western Canada, including Alberta, leads the way for the rest of the country with initiatives to get bio-fuel at the pumps. Emerging, next-generation fuel is being made from wood fiber, algae, corn stocks and crop residues, says Thomson. Currently it comes from canola and soy, drought-resistant crops that utilize a small portion of arable land globally. Thomson points out that clean energy helps to address the social impacts of the petroleum industry, along with the emissions and water use issues.

Thomson says that oil companies are starting to see what the future may hold and are facing a dilemma: "Fight or join." Bio-fuel has become a two billion-litre industry in Canada right now, which essentially these men from Bowen built

from scratch by taking a huge leap of faith and committing fully to the vision.

What the islanders see as the future in transportation is that in a decade you won't see gas fueled cars. Personal transportation, if it isn't self-propelled, will be driven by electricity, but the transportation industry with large vehicles like trucks, planes and trains couldn't easily work off batteries. Instead, Thomson and Hooper are hoping that these heavy polluters will be switched over to cleaner bio-fuels.

"The biggest challenge right now," says Thomson, "is the perception that we can't afford a clean economy." The entrepreneur goes on, "10 years ago, I never thought that five per cent of all the gas and diesel in B.C. would be renewable."

Now the men have collaborated with industry leaders from 24 countries and Hooper is leading an initiative with 25 companies on clean energy projects. Hooper says that change is happening all around. You may not see it, but it's a wave that's building.

"It's like the tide slowly coming in. It's been building and now it's hitting the beach. Where we are with Paris is just one of the more significant milestones in the change process."

"There were big dreams and big promises in Paris," says Hooper. "But now what?"

Public policy is changing as is social awareness, and momentum is building to support reduced emissions. "Transformation is possible," says Hooper. "Just because things are the way they are, doesn't mean it can't change. Humans are capable of creating big changes; positive changes." The men agree. Hooper says "Paris threw the ball into the air, now we will catch and run with it."