

Ms. Green's resolutions for a greener future

DEAR MS. GREEN,

Any resolutions for the New Year?
Wondering in Wendell

DEAR WONDERING,

Ms. Green hasn't made New Year's resolutions in a very long time. If there's anything her advanced age has taught her, it's that changing one's life based on an arbitrary date isn't particularly effective or long-lasting. That said, while Ms. Green doesn't make resolutions on the first of each year, she tends to be rather contemplative on her birthday. And since Ms. Green's birthday falls at the end of the year, and this year her birthday is one of significance (being a likely half-way point in her life, if she is lucky enough to live into her 90s), she has a few thoughts on the matter, most irrelevant to the subject of this column, but a few which have pertain mightily. Less energy, less stuff, more local, more healthy, and more focus on the environment — Ms. Green has room for improvement on each of these.

Things Ms. Green is thinking about as she moves into the second half of her life:

1. Less energy. Ms. Green has gotten into some pretty bad habits recently in regards to



energy use. Leaving computers and other electronics on all night, turning up the thermostat, and putting lots of mileage on her gas-guzzling SUV are all energy-wasting ruts in which she finds herself. She will stop all of this, immediately. Before her birthday and definitely before January 1. And of course, with the help of Mr. Green, Ms. Green will continue to weatherize her home and consider energy efficiency. Ms. Green will return to her roots! And will quit driving to Chapel Hill three to four times a week.

2. Less stuff. This is particularly difficult during the winter holidays, isn't it, Readers? This is the season for giving and getting, isn't it? What if, for every one thing you received, you got rid of two? Ms. Green actually loves to declutter, so decreasing stuff counts as "me-time" to her, an item not on this particular

list, but of course a goal for better self-care all around.

3. More local. Ms. Green would love to be one of those people who only buys local for a year. She could start a blog (which you would all read, naturally) and post about her purchases and then turn it into a best-selling book. Hmm...it's a thought. A thought that's been thunk by others, of course, but the general principal is a good one. Ms. Green will try to buy less out of county, and more in county. Less big-box, more little brick and mortar. Less box store, more thrift store.

4. Healthy eating. Needs to be fresher, local-er, and more seasonal and clearly, less processed. Now, Ms. Green could give you all kinds of excuses for her eating habits, mostly having to do with the three male people she lives with, but really, who is she kidding? Ms. Green loves a tater tot as much as the 11-year old does. But this is truly one area where Ms. Green has no excuse. Ms. Green needs to eat more green(s). As do the little Greens and Mr. Green. Period. In central North Carolina we have a wonderful, bountiful, four-season harvest and we should all be taking advantage of that.

5. More focus on the environment. Ms. Green's previous goals for the second half of her life are all environmentally positive and in general, she gives herself a solid B on the grading scale of environmental friendliness, but there's so much more she could be doing in that regard. From the little things, like paying better attention to packaging, to the big things, like supporting organizations that help make large-scale changes in our world's future — these are all areas to think about.

What about you, Wondering, and all Ms. Green's readers, for that matter? What are you going to do differently in the year(s) ahead?

DEAR MS. GREEN,

My utility is offering free energy audits. Is this a good idea? Why should I pay a professional auditor if I can get one for free through my large and all-powerful utility?

Saving in SW Durham

DEAR \$AVING,

Sigh.

Ms. Green has answered this question so many times before she wonders if anyone besides her 14 regulars every reads this column.

Bottom line: you get what you pay for.

If someone is doing a free energy audit, it's either a low-quality audit (they use no equipment to test and/or the person doing it is not trained and experienced) OR they will make up the price of the audit in the cost of the weatherization they are promoting.

In the case of free audits provided by utilities — well, let Ms. Green just say this: Mr. Green recently visited a house that had been the beneficiary of one of these free audits, and what Mr. Green found was a very, very, very SIMPLE report on recommended energy improvements (like change out your light bulbs, seal your home's air leaks, and add insulation — things Ms. Green talks about ALL the time), AND a report which didn't recognize several health and safety issues in the home which could potentially be quite dangerous should the homeowner follow this blanket advice.

The homeowner in question had several un-vented gas appliances which any experienced professional auditor would have pointed out could be a safety issue should the home be made more tight.

This gave both Ms. Green and Mr. Green pause. Who is doing these so-called "energy audits" if not someone with certification and knowledge enough to recognize that elementary bit of building science? Surely this huge, all-powerful utility doesn't want to give advice that could — quite literally — kill someone in their home!

So again, Ms. Green repeats: free isn't always free. And often isn't very good.

Ms. Green is Adrienne Bashista, co-owner of Home Performance NC, an energy auditing, energy rating, and home weatherization contracting company and a freelance writer/PR/marketing professional. Home Performance NC can be found on the web: www.homeperformancenc.com and by phone: 91.360.1570. You can contact Adrienne directly at adrienne@drtpress.com.



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