



Interview with...

Tim Rumage

SCOPE volunteer –
Summit for Environmental Action SEE Water co-chair

Where are you from? What brought you to this area? I grew up in Louisville, Kentucky, and lived for awhile in New England & the Canadian Maritime provinces, where I did seabird research. After that, I worked at the Rhode Island School of Design, where I ran a Natural History Museum associated with the school. At the School of Design, I worked with someone who later took a job at Ringling. In 1991, she told me about an open position at the Ringling College as the Environmental Studies Program Coordinator, which I hold today.

How did you begin working with SCOPE & what are you currently doing with SCOPE? I knew of SCOPE through the newspaper for some time before I got involved. I first got personally involved through the Summit for Environmental Action, and then I jumped in with both feet. Now, my formal association with SCOPE is as one of 3 co-chairs of the Summit SEE Water committee. Informally, my work with SCOPE has allowed me to connect with a wider range of conversations in the community – conversations about how Ringling can outreach into the surrounding community, conversations arising from my service on the SEA steering committee, and my work on a Sarasota County Task Force about incentives relating to alternative water use. The network that started with SCOPE keeps flowing outward.


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You’re co-chairing the Summit for Environmental Action’s SEE Water committee. What inspires you to do this?

Multiple reasons – the central importance of water to our lives, future and quality of life. It’s a resource we can’t run out of, but it’s also a resource that is easy to squander. I have a 10 year old daughter who refers to herself as a “Florida girl,” so there’s a real visceral connection to the future health and quality of life in Florida and in this area. I always thought of the future intellectually, but when my daughter says “I’m a Florida girl and I want you to save the planet” there becomes an additional, more visceral level of involvement.

What is your hope for the SEE Water committee in particular and our community as a whole?

In Florida, we have a drought cycle and we want to encourage population growth. Because of that, planning for water for more people during the drought season is difficult and expensive...if you stay with centralized system. We need to develop some form of distributed water use and supply system to store rainwater for later use on our landscapes or for limited uses inside our homes. We get so much seasonal rain that if we could store rainwater we wouldn't have to pump water out of the ground. In Sarasota County, an inch of rain generates over 9 billion gallons of water. In the city of Sarasota, ½ inch of rain is equal to the amount of water the city uses in 19 days. The way we use water now made a great deal of sense when we set up the system, but the assumptions and parameters have changed since and the old model isn't logical in the new conditions.



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There needs to be some augmentation that goes beyond running more pipe. The solutions are all here, but we need to rethink and revision how we make certain connections. We tell our kids they should go to school to be smarter, but when it comes to certain parts of infrastructure, we don't want to be smarter because change is inconvenient. We need to face that with changes, there are no water problems; without changes, there are.

I think the SEE Water committee can highlight the above issues and help show the aesthetic viability of the options. People don't want ugly, so the solutions have to mesh with aesthetics of place. We can't store rainwater in giant tanks and keep a sense of beauty and place. So, let's turn cisterns into sculptural elements or some other visual benefit to the community – that's how you get folks to appreciate and adopt technology. The form of things often affects their adoption – for example, if recycled paper wasn't ugly at first, folks would be using it today. It's no longer unattractive, but because it was at first, its use is limited.

How do you make the unseen visible and conscious? How do you reconsider the assumptions we have made relative to the current reality? I do this at Ringling, an art & design school, because facts don't motivate people to change – there has to be some type of emotional connection to info or implication to make folks change. Nothing makes that connection better than art & design.

What have you learned through your community work? When teaching about the environment we say things like "we're all in this together" and "everything is linked." Doing community work reminds me those statements are absolutely true. As an individual it's easy to feel overwhelmed by what needs to be done or insignificant in what your part is. Once you realize there are other people doing similar things, you start to see the ramifications of those effects. None of our environmental problems were created by a single large event. It's an accumulation of a lot of little things, so doing lots of little good things makes those problems go away, or at least makes them solvable. Big things would solve our issues even faster, but all nature ever asks for is some time to help in the healing process.



"to connect and inspire citizens to create a better community"

To learn more about the Summit for Environmental Action or the SEE Water Committee, visit www.scopexcel.org

To volunteer with SCOPE, call us at (941) 365-8751 or email scope@scopexcel.org

Interview by Kate Irwin, SCOPE Staff, 9.17.09