

## **“You Decide!” Series Shares Information, Sparks Debate Saturday, October 14**

*By Katherine Najacht*

The Bowling Green branch of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) sponsored its first lecture in a new series at the Senior Center this past Saturday. A spin-off of the successful “Great Decisions” series, this series of lectures is titled “You Decide!” and hopes to generate discussion on domestic issues.

Saturday’s featured speaker was Dr. Gary Silverman, BGSU’s Director of Environmental Health Programs. He focused his presentation on controlling energy costs in our homes and lives, and some predictions about our future if we don’t.

Dr. Silverman began by presenting historical data: in the 1950s, heating costs were relatively low, options for energy were fewer, and, he speculated, that expectations for energy use might have been different. Now, Dr. Silverman explained, the era of cheap energy is over. Total oil production is around 50%, and at our current rates of consumption, it will probably be gone by 2050. Developing nations are increasing their demands for oil, so worldwide energy use continues to rise. Unfortunately, Dr. Silverman said, there is no short term energy replacement.

The United States continues to be the largest oil consumer. The average household size has dropped in the past 60 years, while the actual size of the house has more than doubled – from 1100 sq. ft. in the 1940s to 2340 sq. ft. in 2002. In 1950, explained Dr. Silverman, houses had approximately 290 sq. ft. per person, while in 2003, houses had 893 sq. ft. per person. The consumption of oil has risen alarmingly over the past 50 years, and it shows no signs of abating; Dr. Silverman observed that if consumption doesn’t drop, oil will soon be gone.

Conservation of resources, then, is key. “What can we do?” asked Dr. Silverman. We can buy smaller, more energy-efficient homes, and appliances that carry the Energy Star designation. Homeowners can replace their 55% efficient furnaces with furnaces that are 95% efficient. The people of Toronto, Canada, for example, have agreed to band together and help to conserve energy by taking such small steps as setting the thermostat back, upgrading basement and attic insulation and lowering hot water heaters to 122 degrees Fahrenheit. These steps add up to make big differences and to decrease our dependency on oil.

Dr. Silverman continued to advocate conservation, stating that lowering energy use has the potential to result in numerous improvements. By conserving energy, we would save money, reduce U.S. dependence on foreign sources of oil, reduce impact on the climate and even preserve the planet. The climate changes that we are currently experiencing, according to Dr. Silverman, are directly related to and caused by the burning of fossil fuels such as oil, gas and coal. Climate changes affect us all and are an “inter and intra-generational equity issue.” He stated that industrial countries are primarily responsible for causing climate changes, but that developing countries, and the poor people in those countries, are the most vulnerable. “The actions of today will affect future generations,” said Dr. Silverman.

The lecture ended with a discussion of exactly how our energy consumption is linked to temperature changes, global warming, rising sea levels and extreme weather events such as heat waves, more intense precipitation over many areas and higher minimum temperatures. Energy consumption, therefore, affects our health, our agriculture, our forests and our water resources – all excellent reasons to consider energy conservation. If these are not enough, consider the ever-increasing population and therefore, increased demand for oil, coal and gas.

The Bowling Green branch of AAUW will sponsor three more lectures in the "You Decide!" series, taking place at the Senior Center each of the following three Saturdays. All members of the public are invited to attend this series of lectures. Parking is available at the Senior Center and lunch will be served after the presentation for those who are interested.