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Garbage message not wasted on the audience

By Melanie Cummings, Special to the Beaver
Arts & Entertainment

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Home is where the heart is and where garbage accumulates. In filmmaker Andrew Nisker's mind, it's where change must start.

He brought his documentary Garbage! The Revolution Starts at Home, to Encore Cinemas last Wednesday (Dec. 12) for a free screening, courtesy of Councillor Jeff Knoll.

The topical film attracted more than 350 people and packed two theatres.

Garbage! follows an experiment bravely undertaken by the McDonald family: Glen and Michele - the couple featured on the cover - and their children Ariel, 7, Thomas, 4 and Ester, 10 months. (The story begins with director/writer/producer Nisker getting several rejections in his attempt to recruit volunteers.)

For 90 days the McDonalds stocked every bit of trash they created in the garage of their Toronto home.

The time span included such refuse-generating holidays as Halloween and Christmas, where individually-wrapped candies and over-packaged gifts added voluminously to the overflowing heap.

By the end of the self-imposed garbage strike, the McDonalds had accumulated 83 bags of refuse, more than half of which were recyclable material and 320 pounds of wet garbage (compost).

"Every week we take out our garbage and then forget about it," said Nisker. "I hope the film opens viewers' eyes to living differently."

As an asthmatic, Nisker's need to take medication daily is a constant reminder of the airborne pollutants present in the environment.

While he said he thought he was already doing right by the environment through recycling and composting, he had no idea the household cleansers he was using in his home made its indoor air quality 10 to 50 times worse than the quality of the outdoor air he was breathing.

"It's a strange feeling knowing that I could make a difference, but not knowing how," said Nisker.

There are more statistics interspersed throughout the documentary, which include:

- ? There are currently 3,000 landfills in North America.
- ? 1.2 billion cars will be on the road in the next decade.
- ? One trillion plastic bags are used for five minutes through one year.
- ? Trillions of raw sewage is flushed into lakes and waterways each year, which is equal to the amount of water that tumbles over Niagara Falls in 99 days.
- ? 500,000 trees are cut down to produce a Sunday paper for readers across the United States.
- ? Three million water bottles are disposed of daily.
- ? 2,000 Torontonians die each year as a result of poor air quality.

The film also features interviews with expert spokespeople from Citizens for a Safe Environment, Recycling Magazine, the Keeper of the Mountains Foundation, and Pennies of Promise.

Garbage! is being shown on theatre and television screens around the world and Nisker hopes it will snowball into massive change. In the meantime, here are some other changes worth acting on, he said.

- ? Don't buy over-packaged products such as bananas, rosemary and salad sealed in plastic.
- ? Considering that cars are the leading cause of global warming, drive less.
- ? Changing to an eco-friendly laundry detergent can spark a revolution all on its own.

For his part, Nisker won't buy toys for his four-year-old son, Sebastian, that require batteries this Christmas and Knoll, who is a part owner of the Speers Road cinema, said that Garbage! inspired a switch to using recyclable popcorn bags. Knoll is in the process of looking for cups that fill the same criteria.

For more information about the film it also has an accompanying website at www.garbagerevolution.ca, which is replete with concrete ideas to stop overburdening the planet with too much trash.

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