

Greetings by Dr. Regina Peruggi
Fifth Annual Eco-Festival
Kingsborough Community College
Tuesday, April 27, 2010, 10:20 a.m., MAC Rotunda

Good morning. I'm delighted to be here today to open our 5th annual Eco-Festival – Kingsborough's three-day series of events dedicated to learning about our environment and the environmental challenges that face us now and in the not-too-distant future. It wasn't too long ago – in 2008 to be exact – that our Eco-Festival won the City University of New York Sustainability Award for outstanding environmental education and advocacy. Since that time, I think that our program has gotten even better with wider participation, more events, and an array of well-known and distinguished lecturers. Now, I realize that this year, we're a bit behind all of the activities that occurred last week surrounding the annual celebration of Earth Day on April 22nd. Unfortunately, sometimes there are unavoidable scheduling conflicts here on campus. Nevertheless, our dedication to this program and to the cause of learning about the critical issues of our environment that loom before us with increasing urgency remains undiminished. Also undiminished is our dedication not only to learning more about our problems but also to becoming an active part of the solution to those problems.

In a recent *New York Times* editorial, Thomas Friedman, who writes some very insightful articles about our environmental challenges and their relationship to politics and the economy, quoted physicist Joe Romm as stating that “We are not sufficiently desperate to do what is needed....” This attitude – one that we don't have to do anything until our backs are up against the wall – is a mind-set that must change. And there is probably no more important area of human activity where change is so critically important as in our relationship to the environment – BECAUSE IF WE DON'T CHANGE, THINGS WON'T CHANGE. Unfortunately, it seems that unless we're presented with a clear and present danger that we all recognize, we are very reluctant to take action. Take, for example, our approach to alternate sources of fuel. For a short time, when gas prices soared, sales of gas-guzzling vehicles plummeted and there was lots of talk about hybrid cars and developing alternate fuels. Recently, gas prices have become slightly less painful and our focus on fuel efficiency has vanished. Our inattention to developing alternate sources of energy is not only destructive to our environment but it's destructive to our economy and to our political position as well. Almost three-fourths of our foreign trade deficit can be traced to our purchase of foreign oil – much of it from countries that are not particularly sympathetic to us. We can't afford to have short memories; we can't afford to be inattentive to persistent environmental problems.

Of course, with problems as immense as the very survival of our planet as we know it, it's also tempting to just give up, concede that as individuals we won't have much of an impact anyway, and let nature run its course. In yet another reading of T.S. Eliot's words – “This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but a whimper.” The whimper would be us giving up and doing nothing. This too would be a mistaken attitude for we

have the duty of good stewardship – of being responsible for the careful management of something entrusted to our care. And what is entrusted to our care is this very earth on which we live and on which we are all dependent. Stewardship is also a sense of responsibility to those who come after us – to the generations that will either thank us for our thoughtful attention to our natural surroundings or who will be burdened with trying to clean up the mess that we leave them.

We all can play a part in creating the climate for change that can combat climate change. We can commit ourselves to doing the little things that eventually add up to become big things. It may only be doing a more careful job of recycling at home, or reading a label before using a potentially toxic product, or drinking our excellent New York City tap water rather than buying a name brand bottle, or supporting companies that act in an environmentally responsible way. We can all do something – even if it's only a little. And that little something can also mean becoming a more knowledgeable citizen and active voter. I was pleased to read that one of the missions of this Eco-Fest is to promote the concepts of civic engagement and global citizenship. It is becoming increasingly important to know where our elected officials stand on environmental issues, because they will write the laws, they will draft the regulations, they will appoint the public officials that will have a profound impact not only on how we behave as a nation but on how we act internationally to solve problems that have no national bounds. As Robert Kennedy once said, "Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of all those acts will be written the history of this generation."

When this festival was first envisioned over five years ago, there wasn't much discussion in our university about sustainability or "going green." That's changed, and I think that Kingsborough can take some pride in the fact that we've been active and continue to be active in advancing the conversation on environmental topics. We have a fine program of events lined up over the next few days. I would like to thank the many members of the Kingsborough faculty from a variety of different disciplines who are making presentations, hosting events, and moderating discussions. Professors Tara Weiss and Betsy McCully have been the faculty leaders of our Eco-Festival since its inception. This year, since Professor Weiss is on sabbatical, Professor McCully has shouldered much of the organizational burden. She, with support from Associate Provost Reza Fakhari and his office, have done an excellent job. If you haven't yet looked at the Eco-Festival pages on our Kingsborough website, I hope you will do so. They're filled with lots of good information. Professor Betsy Thompkins was responsible for pulling together research and library resources for the site. We have also had corporate support of our efforts from Con Edison, National Grid, and the New York Times. I thank them for their generous financial participation in this worthwhile cause. And I welcome all of the distinguished guest lecturers to our college, and thank them for taking time out of their busy schedules to share their work and their insights with us.

But as an educational activity, our Eco Festival would be worth very little if it did not receive the commitment and involve the active participation of our Kingsborough students. In that respect, I am very pleased to note the many student organizations that have worked on this program including the KCC chapter of the Student World

Assembly, our Phi Theta Kappa chapter, the Honors club, and the Responsibility to Care Program.

So, I hope that you will all attend as many of our belated Earth Week events as you possible can over the next few days. Learn from the lectures and presentations, have fun at the activities, and reflect on how you can become – how we all can become – more environmentally responsible citizens. Thank you and welcome to Eco-Festival 2010.