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Two Lafayette men pulled into the Green Rings circle

By *Sophie Braccini*

Former Vice President Al Gore presents Steve Richard (left) and Wei-Tai Kwok with their Green Rings from the Climate Reality Project. Photo provided

Steven Richard and Wei-Tai Kwok call themselves ordinary citizens, but the volunteer actions they took over the last six years have pulled them from making a difference behind the scenes to the front stage with former Vice President Al Gore. At the recent Climate Reality Project training in Los Angeles these two Lamorinda citizens were honored with a Green Ring Award for "outstanding work towards solving the climate crisis."

"It was like stepping into the movie we had been watching, and being part of the action," recalls Richard, adding that it came as a complete surprise to him and his friend Kwok when an hour before the award they were pulled from the sessions they were mentoring and heard they would be the honorees.

On stage, Gore recognized the two men for inspiring others and leading to actions in support of fighting climate change and greenhouse gas emissions.

Richard and Kwok believe that they were acknowledged because, following their common inspiration, they started developing local groups - meet-ups at first, that were emulated by the organization and morphed into chapters. The two of them, whom Gore affectionately called "Batman and Robin," are now managing the Bay Area chapter of the Climate Reality Project, engaging and organizing people to support legislation, engage companies and organizations to affect change, and create climate challenges all over the Bay Area. There are now 80 chapters in the U.S., 40 of them in universities.

It was Gore's 2006 movie, "An Inconvenient Truth," that started the adventure for the Lafayette residents. Kwok remembers how, after seeing the movie, he wondered if it was all true, and if it was, what should be done about it. After a few months of research to confirm the science behind Gore's claim that climate change was upon us and human-driven, he decided to leave his marketing company in San Francisco to work for the renewable energy industry.

In the meantime, Gore started the Climate Reality Project, inviting any interested people to be trained to become an ambassador for fighting climate change in their community. The program offers trainings to 800-900 people at a time all around the world three times a year. Kwok went in 2013 and Richard was trained in 2016.

Richard was not new to a green commitment; over 10 years ago he and Bart Carr started the group Sustainable Lafayette, which continues to be very active locally. This time in Los Angeles, Richard says that about 250 people came from the Bay Area and are now back, energized and ready to make change happen.

Richard says that each time he goes back to a Climate Reality Project meeting he learns something different as new facts emerge, new science is analyzed, and positive changes happen that can be shared.

Richard and Kwok may be preaching to the choir in the Bay Area, but they see that in everyday life many things are left to be done that could make a difference. Richard talks about MCE, for example, the green energy company that now provides electricity to most of Lafayette and Moraga. Residents can opt for a "Deep Green" level for their electricity supply, meaning that 100 percent of their electricity is sourced from renewable production. Right now only a small fraction of the population does so, when it costs just a few dollars more a month. "Our objective is to have at least 1,000 household choosing deep green locally," says Richard.

Richard says that he devotes about 80 percent of his time to the organization and that this group is working alongside other very impactful organizations such as 350.org or Citizens' Climate Lobby. People interested in the project can join the chapter at <https://www.climate reality project.org/chapters>.

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