

Don't know much about geography?

by Leslie Vryenhoek

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Geography Awareness Week offers a world of intriguing and informative events from Nov. 14-19.

If you don't know much about geography, next week's activities will help you get your bearings. **Geography Awareness Week runs Nov. 14-19 on the St. John's campus.** The week is a new initiative for the Canadian Association of Geographers, and is modeled on the U.S National Geographic Society week that's been held since 1987.

According to Dr. Chris Sharpe, past president of the association and a Memorial professor, the venture aims to highlight how the physical and human geography of this country - and this province - is changing, and the implications to the social, cultural, economic, political and environmental landscapes.

To battle what he calls "rampant geographic illiteracy," Dr. Sharpe advocated for the initiative.

"It's a beginning, to try and help people understand how geography impacts lives," he says. "We want to give the public the same message that we give to our first year students: there is a geography of everything."

A number of events are planned throughout the week, starting with a Geonormous Book Sale in the Science Building lobby on Tuesday. (Shelves already bursting? Donations welcome at the Geography main office, SN-2012.)

Three lunchtime lectures will explore local issues:

On Tuesday, Dr. Alvin Simms will explore how an analysis of the way people, businesses and public services interact within rural areas - and how these interactions

affect travel patterns - could lead to planning for regions where services, structures and industries are located for improved functionality.

On Thursday, Dr. Norm Catto will detail the risk and reality of natural hazards in Newfoundland and Labrador, and how a more integrated approach to assessing risk and vulnerability is vital to effective emergency planning.

On Friday, Dr. Trevor Bell will discuss his research on lead contamination of soils and why it matters.

The today.mun calendar provides times and places.

The centrepiece of the week is [GIS Day](#) on Wednesday, which features an exhibit in the Inco Innovation Centre lobby from 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. This annual global event offers a chance for the public to become more familiar with the importance of GIS, or geographic information system, technology, which includes computer software, data, and solutions that are used worldwide.

Dr. Rodolphe Devillers, who organized this event with Dr. Yolanda Wiersma in Biology, noted: "This isn't for GIS specialists. We want people who don't have a clue to come and learn more." He added the visually appealing and interactive exhibit has been promoted to high schools in the St. John's area, and many have expressed an interest.

According to Dr. Devillers, the planned "GIS Corridor" will have demonstrations of mapping and global positioning software, equipment used by land surveyors, and a series of displays by the federal and provincial governments, the City of St. John's, and various Memorial departments and researchers, such as Dr. Robert Sweeny.

Dr. Sweeny, a history professor, is a co-investigator (with geographer Dr. Sherry Olson of McGill) on one of the largest historical GIS projects in the world. The project, Montréal l'avenir du passé - Montreal, the future of the past - marries high quality historical maps and GIS technology to create computerized maps of that city.

"We have chosen six dates in the recent history of Montreal: 1825, 1846, 1880, 1912, 1949 and 2000. A wide variety of historical sources can be linked to each these maps," explains Dr. Sweeny. "I will be demonstrating some of the applications from the 19th century material that we have developed for use in the classroom."

In the evening, Dr. Devillers has organized a social mixer for members of the GIS community, sponsored by the Canadian Institute of Geomatics. Everyone is invited to come out to Bitters Pub at 5 p.m. (Refreshments; cash bar.)

Geography Awareness Week ends with the Geoamazing Race on Sunday. From 12 - 4 p.m.. Test what you've learned and take part in a wild adventure of geographic challenges (can you put up a tent in a hurricane? or find traces of ancient civilizations in a sandbox?) spread around the St. John's campus. Register with the Memorial University

Geographical Society (MUGS) by emailing MUGSexec@gmail.com by Wednesday, Nov. 15.