

Dr. green genes

Some academics like to lock themselves in ivory towers, avoiding the real world where they might get their hands dirty.

But not McMaster University chemist Brian McCarry. Oh, he can talk and walk the professor's game. He can fill blackboards with chemical equations and he's one of Canada's foremost researchers in identifying pollutants that cause genetic damage and mutations.

What he is not, though, is aloof, or separated from real-life concerns. When his expertise in environmental health is needed by the local community, he drops everything, gathers his gear and comes out.

He measured air pollutants to help determine health risks in the 1990 Hagersville tire fire and the 1997 Plastimet fire, even when it meant returning home late at night looking like a chimney sweep from the black smoke. He's taken part in the Randle Reef sediment remediation project, the Bay Area Restoration Council, the Hamilton Air Quality Initiative and served as chair of Clean Air Hamilton.

On Wednesday he will receive the prestigious Dr. Victor Cecilioni Award for the Environmentalist of the Year for 2004. The award is being given to recognize McCarry's "academic and personal efforts to solve environmental problems in our community and improve the environmental quality of life in Hamilton."

Hamilton is fortunate to have expertise in a wide range of areas within the walls of McMaster. And those talents become especially appreciated when they are applied to local problems. It helps in research and it assists the community. Thankfully, numerous McMaster professors are known for their local efforts.

Among them, McCarry is particularly notable for finding a balance between research, teaching and administrative responsibilities and committing himself to the community. He is a worthy environmentalist of the year and an example for all academics.

Mark McNeil