

## **2007 Interview with Tara DePorte**

Perhaps it's a sign of the "greening" of the times when climate change dominates conversation of two unlikely groups: business professionals and the fashion week set.

On a Tuesday earlier this month, climate change was the theme for two separate events that shared two things in common. Both were pegged to Al Gore's Climate Project, the organization behind his Oscar-winning documentary "An Inconvenient Truth." And both featured Tara DePorte, one of only about 20 people in New York City and 1,000 people nationally, selected to be part of Gore's communication cavalry, spreading the word about climate change to anyone who will listen.

On this day, DePorte, 28, took a break from her day job at the Lower East Side Ecology Center to be a full-time climate change crusader. She donned skinny jeans, knee-high boots and a Climate Project t-shirt turned halter-top for the fashion week event. Her job was to answer questions at a Climate Project information booth, before the red-carpet reception later that evening.

For the business crowd, who were gathering in midtown, DePorte planned to deliver a slideshow of climate change "solutions." She was drawing on her two-days of Climate Project training in early January, plus her Masters in climate change and policy from Columbia University.

"I've learned you need to adapt to your audience," said DePorte.

As the green movement picks up steam (and Oscars), the people at the forefront tend to be young, smart and tirelessly motivated. DePorte doesn't have one job, she has three, or four if you count her volunteer work for the Climate Project. She deliberately takes it all on. Her goal is spread the word, and when she can, inspire people to action.

DePorte's first job is as program director at the Lower East Side Ecology Center (LESEC). The Center's small building in East River Park was donated by the New York City Parks Department. From this tiny outpost, DePorte and her two colleagues do everything from electronics recycling drives (collecting people's old computers, cell phones, etc. for proper disposal) to educational outreach.

When DePorte joined the Center three years ago, she would call local schools to tell them about their programs. Now, schools seek them out for their traveling programs about recycling, composting, East River ecology and, in the near future, climate change. At their last major recycling event in October, four camera crews were on hand. "It shows us how much our work is valued," said DePorte.

DePorte also works as the United Nations Liaison for the Women's Global Green Action Network, a program that tries to connect women doing grassroots environmental work around the world. Since September, she's led a group of college-aged women in the

planning of a two-day workshop called the Grassroots Academy, which will precede the United Nations 15<sup>th</sup> Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in April. The goal is to give participants a forum to explore issues like industrial development, climate change, air pollution/atmosphere, and energy in advance of the CSD. “I’m hoping this type of thing can be done in other cities,” said DePorte.

Teaching and lecturing at Columbia University is the third major piece of DePorte’s active C.V. She received her Masters there in 2005 and continues to maintain her connection with the School of International and Public Affairs and the Department of Earth and Environmental Science.

Before going to Columbia, DePorte spent four months working runways in New York, Milan, Paris, and Athens. She mentions this only when asked and even then stresses that she’s not a fashion model turned environmentalist, “I am an environmentalist who dabbled in fashion.”

Be it brief, DePorte’s experience made her an ideal volunteer at the Climate Project’s fashion week fundraiser. The event was the brainchild of French fashion maven, Mariel Gamboa. Gamboa tapped celebrities and models including Gwyneth Paltow, Christy Turlington, Kate Moss, and Jade Jagger, to design t-shirts that were auctioned off at an evening reception held at downtown’s Industria Superstudio. By day, there was a tradeshow for buyers and an information booth for the Climate Project.

DePorte saw the event as an opportunity to build contacts and support for the Climate Project and her local grassroots work. “I’m trying to bring, for lack of a better term, famous faces and names to the work we’re doing New York City. So I was doing a lot of networking,” said DePorte.

That same day, shortly before 9 p.m., DePorte left the fashion crowd, and went to the SONY Studio Theater on West 56<sup>th</sup> Street. Here the members of Net Impact, a group of socially conscious business professionals, had packed the screening room to watch Al Gore’s Oscar-winning documentary, “An Inconvenient Truth.”

When DePorte arrived at the theater, all 73-seats were filled. But when the credits rolled, half the audience slipped quickly out the exit door. Facing a half-empty house, and the news that the slide projector was broken, DePorte adapted to her audience opting for a brief Q&A session. She’d save the presentation for another time.

DePorte finished the day unfazed and ready to talk about her latest idea: the “Climate Crew.” She wants to build a coalition of groups working on climate change in New York City, “whether its education, outreach, research, whatever,” and bring them together to share information and resources. She says the idea is still blossoming, but then she handed me the flyer.