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## Local News

Saturday, February 18, 2023

### Reducing waste one plastic container at a time



Jason Hine refills a glass of olive oil at his shop Ditty Bag in Mystic Sunday, December 18, 2022. Hine focuses on reducing plastic waste both in his home and offers solutions and community through the store. (Sarah Gordon/The Day)

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December 31, 2022 3:44 pm

By **Bridget Shirvell**

Mystic resident Jason Hine can remember the exact moment he decided he had to do anything and everything he could to fight climate change.

"In 2018, I was reading a National Geographic article that described the scene off the coast of Australia where half the Great Barrier Reef had died in a heat wave," Hine said. "I was stunned, shocked and felt my heart sink. All those worries I had years ago about climate change came back and have stayed with me ever since."

Up until that moment, Hine had a vague concern about climate change, but like many, he struggled with knowing how to make a difference and how to fit making that difference into his life.

"In my college years, I was quite concerned about climate change and global warming but then I got caught up in my own life and thoughts about my own future became my worries. Then when I had a family, I had a new set of worries," Hine said.

After that magazine article, though, Hine, who has a background as an educator, researched the climate crisis. He started volunteering for Citizens' Climate Lobby, a nonprofit that worked with legislators on climate solutions and continued to think about ways he could make a difference, eventually focusing on slowing his plastic footprint to reduce his carbon footprint.

"I feel guilty if I walk into the grocery store and I get a bag, a plastic bag of rice, say, but if I can come with my glass container that I bring from home and I fill it up with rice, I feel like I'm a little more in touch with what the world needs," Hine said.

It's almost impossible to go to the supermarket and not come home with some plastic waste. Disposability is embedded into modern life. From the 1970s and the 1990s, plastic waste generation more than tripled, according to the UN Environment



Programme. In the 2000s, the amount of plastic waste produced increased more in 10 years than in the previous 40 years. The world now generates more than 400 million tons of plastic waste every year.

All that plastic negatively impacts the planet, wildlife and likely human health. It clogs up waterways, kills marine life and wildlife, has been found in human tissue and blood and, when exposed to the sun, releases methane, a particularly potent greenhouse gas, as it degrades. Plus, more than 99% of plastic is made from chemicals sourced from fossil fuels, like oil, coal and gas. In other words, while clean energy to power homes and vehicles catches on, we will only be able to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and the climate-harmful emissions they create by reducing our dependence on plastic.

In recent years, shoppers like Hine have become more concerned about plastic packaging — a 2021 Consumer Brands/Ipsos poll found that 87 percent of respondents were concerned about plastic packaging. Yet, the adoption of reusable packaging will require a fundamental shift in everything from our shopping habits, to the supply chain, to corporate leadership.

"It's tough, but now that I'm in it for the long haul it's not as frustrating," Hine said. "I know that bit by bit my family and I will get to a place where I feel much better about the amount of plastic waste we produce."

The key to reducing his waste, Hine has found, is not bringing it into the house. That means that instead of buying a big plastic jug of laundry detergent, he now uses laundry detergent sheets where there is still some waste, but it's a small cardboard box that is easier to recycle. He buys bulk dry foods and composts and has turned his passion for fighting for the planet's health into a business.

Combating ingrained habits is hard, but Hine tries to plant little seeds of doing things differently with his own family and the larger southeastern Connecticut community through the zero-waste shop he opened in 2021.

Named after the bags fishermen and sailors carried essential odds and ends in, **The Ditty Bag**, at 7 Roosevelt Ave., Mystic, is a respite for shoppers, environmentalists and coffee lovers alike. With freshly roasted coffee, comfortable spots to sit in and filled with products designed to help people live less wastefully, Hine's Mystic shop is a guide to making small changes that can have ripples of change.

When Hine opened the store, it was largely because he wanted to make fighting climate change a career and the products The Ditty Bag sells are one part of that. Still, he also designed the store to spark conversations, get people thinking about their lifestyle and the environment and ultimately help people come together and organize for change.

The shop has become a gathering place for environmentalists and activists in the local region. Sometimes, there are official networking events with, for instance, newly elected state Rep. Aundré Bumgardner or letter-writing campaigns around specific legislation at the state level. Other times it's simply people meeting by chance and having conversations about how they create a healthier planet. There is always coffee. And with other people that are perhaps just at the beginning of their environmental journey, Hine offers many ideas and solutions for reducing waste without judgment.

"When a first-time customer or someone maybe just window shopping comes in, I'll introduce myself and say, 'I'd opened the store to help people reduce their carbon footprint and their plastic footprint and if you have any questions let me know.' I want to make it clear what we're doing here and sometimes that sparks a larger conversation, sometimes it doesn't."

Hine is honest with anyone who comes in, and he often struggles to live waste-free.

"We should be our best shoppers but we're not," Hine said. "It's really hard to get my family on board with everything. I'm not so cool with my kids right now. But I'm glad I have this store because I have found a few things that are super easy and I'm also learning from others."

"I use shampoo bars at home and at least one of my kids does as well," Hine said. "It's a nice feeling when I find a product like a shampoo bar that works."

### 5 tips for reducing your plastic packaging waste

1. Think reduce, reuse, and recycle in that order.
2. Do a trash audit. Take a close look at your trash and figure out what plastic packaging waste you're routinely producing. Laundry detergent bottle? Look for an option with less waste, like detergent sheets. Yogurt containers? Buy the biggest container you can.
3. If you have a choice to buy a product in a plastic container or an aluminum can or glass jar, go with aluminum or glass. They're recyclable, and most plastic is not.
4. Skip those thin plastic produce bags. You can put your produce straight in your cart or a reusable bag and wash them when



you get home.

5. Found a product that works for you or your family? Tell others about it.

*What changes - big or small - have you made to reduce your carbon footprint? Post in the comments of this article on theday.com or send an email to [t.cotter@theday.com](mailto:t.cotter@theday.com).*

## READER COMMENTS

**Lyle Green** December 31, 2022 at 20:37

[Report](#)

It is about mindset Thomas. The changes you refer to are more than dramatic and wrenching. but we have to start somewhere. The outlook is dim, especially when you take notice of what Brian offers up as an example of urban reality regarding recycling. The groundswell movement will require everyone onboard to contribute. More than a steep mountain to climb to be sure. Mindsets need to be shaped one step at a time through creative thinking, intellectual brilliance, realistic and unselfish planning, incredibly convincing salesmanship and a deep societal commitment to survive. I'm sure you have some practical constructive thoughts. Did I mention inclusive world wide group effort? Mindset is the beginning. Sharing and collaboration are the means. It is time for the real leaders to stand up. The goal is existential. I make a concerted effort to pollute less and respect the environment, but I am not fooling myself that it will change the world, however, the collective conservative things we all do add up to something and keep us moving in the right direction. It is oh so difficult to keep the cynic in me at bay. but, like I said before, the take away from article is actionable.

**Christopher Johnson** December 31, 2022 at 19:14

[Report](#)

Kudos to Jason and The Ditty Bag for being at the forefront of sustainable living right here in Mystic. He also makes a mean latté – bring your own reusable to-go cup, of course.

**THOMAS COUSER** December 31, 2022 at 14:05

[Report](#)

These are admirable people doing good things, fine role models. But let's not pretend that any of this will have any appreciable impact. Arresting climate change will require structural changes in our economy and our way of life. There's a danger that ordinary citizens think that they are making a difference. The US military is one of the world's greatest polluters, yet we pass ever greater "defense" budgets.

**LYNN SCHRODER** December 31, 2022 at 12:49

[Report](#)

Thank you for covering this important topic and great local business.

**Chuck THOMPSON** December 31, 2022 at 12:45

[Report](#)

No matter how many new regulations and ordinances are made To the smiling delight of our podium, camera-ready politicians, nothing will change until consumer disposable plastic, as known today is worldwide outright banned. Scientists continue to develop completely biodegradable plastic that will not harm the planet or other plastics considered permanent types.

**Lyle Green** December 31, 2022 at 12:28

[Report](#)

Good article. The take away is actionable.

**Brian Brother** December 31, 2022 at 07:28

[Report](#)

It is discouraging to drive around New London on garbage pick up day and see NO, Zero as in NONE blue recycling containers out



the street. Where does all of that recycling go? We need a better system and obviously more emphasis on educating folks on the benefits of caring about our environment.

**John Ehlers** December 31, 2022 at 07:22

**Report**

We shop at the Ditty Bag and are doing several things mentioned in the article.  
A big change that my wife started has resulted in a substantial reduction in plastic waste and has been completely painless. We simply buy eggs and milk in cardboard containers rather than plastic. Easy!

**ANNE NELSON** December 30, 2022 at 15:21

**Report**

Helpful information. Thank you.

#### STORIES THAT MAY INTEREST YOU



##### Mystic Seaport Museum comes alive for Wintertide festivities

Mystic — After a long winter's rest, Wintertide awakened the Mystic Seaport Museum on Saturday for the new year. From live reindeer and Saint Bernard dogs, to ice sculptures and s'mores, there was som...



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##### Howard balances being a legislator and a police officer

Editor's note: The Connecticut General Assembly website says the legislature "is considered to be part-time." The National Conference of State Legislatures puts Connecticut between full-t...



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### Courtney says new HUD mold standards a start; more needed

U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney, D-2nd District, called it a “wake-up call” that Branford Manor, a federally subsidized housing development in the City of Groton, was inspected in June 2022 and received a pass...

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