

Green Expo attracts the curious

By [Erin Sullivan](#), Times Staff Writer

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DADE CITY — Patrick and April Kolen had just moved to Florida days before Hurricane Jeanne struck. It was 2004 and the Kolens had a toddler and a 6-week-old baby — their belongings were still in boxes and they had no power. The heat was sweltering and April couldn't keep the children cool. The Kolens faced this new world by candlelight, terrified. But they were staying.

"I'm stubborn," said Patrick, who is from the Netherlands. He and April met in 1999, after chatting on a folklore Web site and wanting to meet in person. They married and lived in New Hampshire for three years before moving to Port Richey, where April had relatives.

Patrick and April became survivalists during those long, scary days during Jeanne. They bought a gas generator, but it was noisy and dangerous. It didn't give permanent safety.

They bought a solar-powered one and kept researching other alternative energy products — things to protect themselves in case of disaster, but also would be earth-friendly. The Netherlands are below sea level and if the glaciers melt and the oceans rise, Patrick's country would vanish.

"We are all more dependent on the environment than most people think," Patrick said Saturday at the Green Solutions Expo at the Pasco County Fairgrounds in Dade City. He and his wife have put all of their own research to work in a store they opened last spring, Skyecrafts Solar Store in Hudson. Most of their products are made in the United States. They were one of dozens of vendors and organizations at the expo, trying to teach about living a life kinder to the earth.

One item at their display table kept stopping people — a self-composting toilet, priced at \$1,450. It doesn't need water and can be placed anywhere, as it isn't attached to anything. The waste goes down into a bottom tumbler, which can be turned and aerated by a handle much like any composter. All moisture is evaporated and Patrick said it doesn't smell.

"That toilet is keeping us going," April said, holding her youngest child, Rose, on her hip. It's hard running a small business even in good economic times. Things have been rough, but they keep plugging away.

Patrick said people use the compost from the toilet on gardens, once they get past the psychological issue of using compost made from their poo.

April doesn't think anything of it. She has been changing her children's diapers, several times every single day, since 2001.

"It can't be more gross than that," she said.

Patrick, a tall, gentle man, said he's surprised at how resistant many people here are to change — even if it's something small, such as energy-saving light bulbs. But he doesn't give up easily.

"If I can convince one person out of 200, then it's worth it," he said. Seconds later, a woman and her children walked up to their

display at the expo and stared at the toilet.

"What is this?" she asked.

"A self-composting toilet," Patrick said.

"No! Really?" the woman said and Patrick leaned closer, to try to change the world, one person at a time.

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Fast facts

Gardening seminars

The Pasco County Cooperative Extension office has several sessions coming up, including ones on vegetable gardening, rainwater harvesting and growing daffodils and other garden bulbs. All will be at the Pasco County Fairgrounds, 36702 State Road 52 in Dade City.

For specific dates, times and more information, go to pasco.ifas.ufl.edu or call (352) 521-4288, (813) 996-7341 or (727) 847-8177, ext. 4288.

Solar power,

family style

Skyecrafts Solar Store is at 8161 State Road 52 in Hudson. The Web site is www.windandsolarnow.com and the phone number is (727) 862-1682.

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