

In the Wake of Katrina ... Intentional Community Members in Action

# COMMUNITIES

JOURNAL of COOPERATIVE LIVING

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Spring 2006 (Issue #130)

## Peak Oil and Sustainability

**Community Survival**  
During the Coming  
**Energy Decline**

**Peak Oil and  
Community Food  
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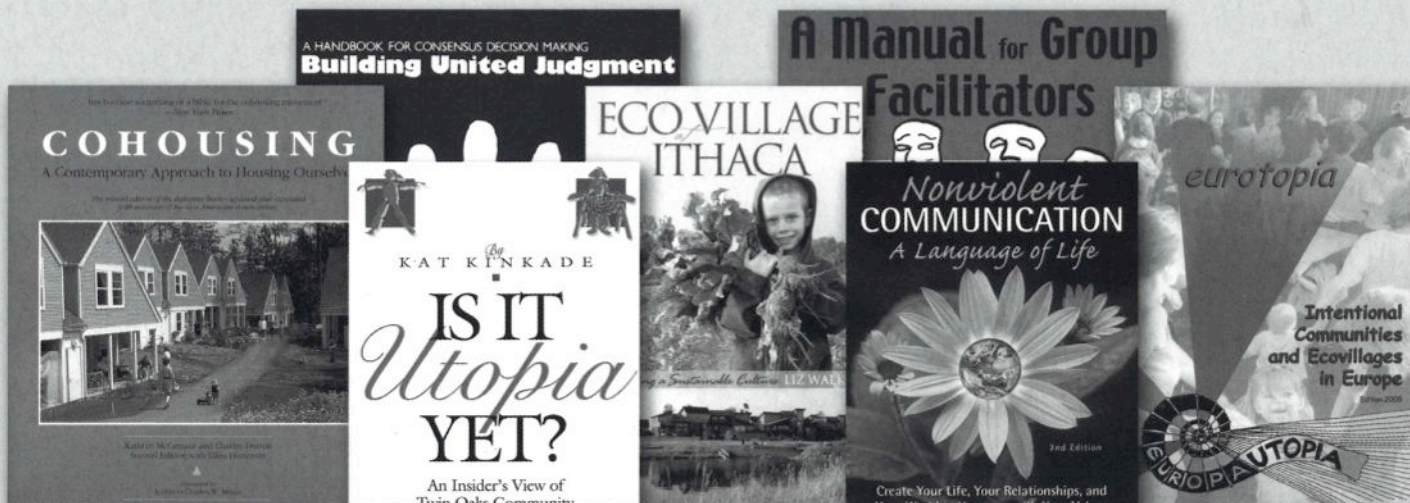
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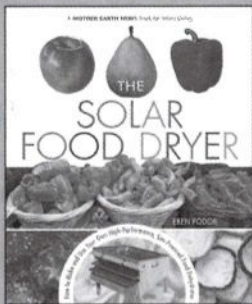
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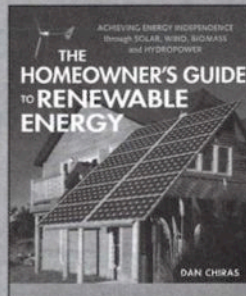
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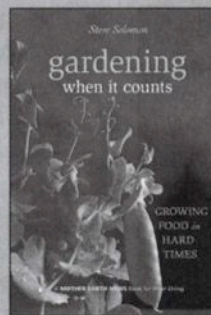
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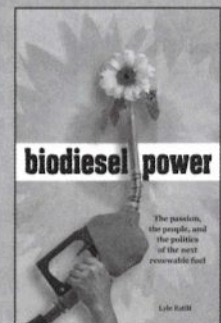
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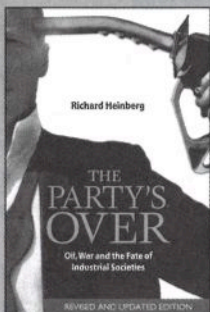
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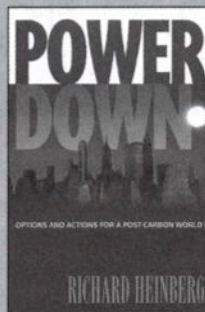
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JOURNAL of COOPERATIVE Living

## FRONT COVER

Members of off-grid Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Missouri demonstrate their biodiesel-fueled car co-op.

Photo: Tony Sirna

## BACK COVER

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# COMMUNITIES

Journal of Cooperative Living

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# LETTERS



Send your comments to [communities@ic.org](mailto:communities@ic.org) or *Communities*, 1025 Camp Elliott Rd., Black Mountain, NC 28711. Your letters may be edited or shortened. Thank you!



## The Traditional Village as Ecovillage

Dear *Communities*,

Many thanks for the excellent job you are doing at putting together the magazine, one issue after the other, always focusing on the core aspects of communal life. We at Torri Superiore love to receive it and appreciate the information you send around. Special thanks for publishing a full page on our ecovillage in Richard Register's article on village design. It helps us to reinforce our belief that traditional villages are to be saved and restored, preserving the local culture and honoring the wisdom of former generations, especially in Italy and around the Mediterranean basin, where most of the land is covered by buildings and nothing new needs to be added.

Lucilla Borio

Torri Superiore Ecovillage  
Ventimiglia, Italy

## Liability Insurance in Urban Ecovillages

Dear *Communities*:

Thanks for the great issue on urban communities. I wonder if you and your readers have ideas about the liability and insurance problems that we now face in further developing our seven-acre urban ecovillage. We currently have six of our potential 27 households on site, not to mention four good hens and 50,000 honey bees—and that's part of the problem. Some insurance carriers reject us because we are "developers" and others (including Community Association Underwriters) are reluctant to insure us because of our bees and "farm equipment." We mistakenly used the "farming" word in describing our plans to grow much of our own food by hand on three acres. We're offering to clarify that we only plan to use hand-tools to garden, and move the bees to another site, but still have not heard back.

I suspect the liability insurance issue is not just an urban problem.

Meanwhile, the coyotes in this small town yelp at night, laughing at the folly of our litigious society. We welcome membership inquiries about our limited-equity cooperative, especially from families, "farmers," and insurance brokers.

Kees Kolff

Port Townsend EcoVillage  
[kkolff@olympus.net](mailto:kkolff@olympus.net)

## Financial Scam Aimed at Cohousers

Dear *Communities*:

I just got off the phone with Detective Walter Siegel of the Shaker Heights Police Department outside Cleveland, Ohio. (I looked up their number and verified that I was calling a real police station.) They just arrested a couple for mortgage fraud and found material in their possession indicating that they were about to embark on a cohousing tour of the Northeast US, starting in Vermont and visiting the following communities: Cobb Hill in Vermont, EcoVillage at Ithaca, Hundredfold Farm, Takoma Village Cohousing, Eastern Village Cohousing, EcoVillage of Loudon County. Upon questioning, the suspects confirmed that this was their plan. Detective Siegel called me because the suspects had my name and number as the contact for Eastern Village. I can only assume they got this info from either [www.cohousing.org](http://www.cohousing.org) or the FIC's website, [www.ic.org](http://www.ic.org), since I'm the Eastern Village Cohousing contact on those

sites and my name doesn't appear on our own website.

The suspects had all sorts of literature on cohousing, green building, sustainable farming, etc. Detective Siegel is calling the contacts for the other communities on the list as well.

He told me the suspects' names. [*Editor's Note: If you want these names please email me at communities@ic.org.*] The man is on probation for bank fraud; the woman is \$900,000 in debt. Both parties are suspects in a number of cases of mortgage fraud, identify theft, inflated appraisal scams, and credit hijacking. One of their scams is to buy property, then enter into rent-to-own agreements with buyers, then fail to forward the payments to the bank. The buyer thinks everything is fine until the sheriff shows up with an eviction notice.

I am personally mystified as to why they would target cohousing communities. If I wanted to operate financial scams, cohousing is the last place I would go. Too many smart, informed residents, and they all talk to each other. Makes no sense to me. Plus, cohousing communities don't have that many resales.

In a possibly unrelated development, our resale coordinator received a call yesterday from a woman who claims she is an ambassador to the UN and says that she owns our building and is going to sue the developer and have us all evicted. She has apparently been hanging around the courtyard talking to people (she commented that we are all very friendly and forthcoming with information), and she also called our management company. (Their number is posted by the front door.) Most of us were dismissing her as a crackpot, but we're rethinking in light of this development. I'd be interested in knowing if any other communities have had similar odd experiences recently.

**Katie Henry**  
Eastern Village Cohousing  
Silver Spring, Maryland  
katie-henry@att.net

## Communities and Peak Oil

Dear *Communities*:

Regarding "sustainability" and Peak Oil, I am not aware of any communities in the US that are living sustainably (with a few minor exceptions such as the Amish, although they are living surrounded by many who are living unsustainably). Most of the hype about "sustainability" confuses efficiency with practices that could be continued generation after generation, after

the era of petroleum. Please visit my website [www.permatopia.com](http://www.permatopia.com) to read suggestions for a graceful end to cheap oil and permaculture for nine billion people.

**Mark Robinowitz**  
Eugene, Oregon (Cascadia)

## Tips on Forming New Communities

Dear *Communities*:

I have lots of thoughts about the frustrations of starting a new community; we have been going through lots of them in Concord Village Cohousing. Here are some of the most important things to keep in mind:

1. Never show discouragement in front of the group; always be positive; never criticize. Lots of people will show up for one meeting and leave because it isn't what they thought, or your vision doesn't match theirs, or they aren't willing to compromise, or they get scared, etc. You are like a sieve that will catch only a few fish. You've got to have lots of fish swimming into your net so that you'll always have enough people. Therefore, learn everything you can about marketing and market constantly. Get some brochures made up and carry them everywhere you go and distribute them.

2. Therefore, start a website. A website will attract lots of people if it's reasonably well done. There are places that will host your first site for free and provide site-building tools.

3. Focus on relationships more than getting things done at meetings. If people don't feel warm and welcomed and truly accepted, they won't return. And try to get people to take on a small task; that will help them feel part of the group.

4. Think carefully about each and every meeting so that new people get recognized and acknowledged. Make sure to do introductions and do validations for everyone who has completed their tasks since the last meeting.

5. Do info sessions at places with potential cohousers; find out what the typical demographic is for potential cohousers in your area. In our area, it's Quakers, Unitarians, and patrons of health food stores.

6. Once you have a few people coming regularly, have a social event once every one or two months.

Here's the quick way we describe our project to new people. "Concord Village—an affordable intentional neighborhood with environmentally friendly construction, a walkable

central green, and voluntary community meals within walking distance of a small town."

**Tom Hammer**  
Concord Village  
Concord, Massachusetts  
thammer302@yahoo.com  
[tom.hammer.tripod.com/cohousing](http://tom.hammer.tripod.com/cohousing)

## The "Communal Problem"

Dear *Communities*,

In the 1970s, I searched for an intentional community. I attribute the fact that I didn't find one to my own lack of understanding of what is truly involved in such an enormous social and economic shift, and also the lack of similar understanding in the communities movement as a whole. Later I learned about the cohousing and ecovillage movements, but these seemed to sidestep that tricky business of being "communal," which I was not always comfortable with.

I'm now in my 50s and deeply involved in the challenging process of finding or creating community. The way this journey is going for me personally, at least for now, is actually a rejection of the cohousing model as being too expensive and the ecovillage concept as being too inefficient. Instead, what I see as much more desirable, would be a large community, perhaps as large as 200 people, that shared the land, residences, and most major resources. It would not be income-sharing however, only expense-sharing; and the only required community activity would be contributions towards some minimal maintenance, and food growing and preparation, as meals would be shared.

I believe with careful thought, study, and planning, what I see as the "communal problem" is surmountable. Simplicity, no debt, sharing where desirable, efficiency, and order are the key words. The hypothesis my wife and I share is that this approach could be far less expensive, offer much more free time, incentive, reward, more prosperity, a consistently superior diet, and a richer life experience in general. We believe this is possible, but only if a few basic values (perceptions of reality) are shared and the above-mentioned goals are desired. For more detail check out our website at [www.everything-is-related.info](http://www.everything-is-related.info).

**Chris Greene**  
Bream Lake, Florida

*Chris, what do you mean by the "communal problem"? Would you please write again and say more? —Editor*

### Communities Editorial Policy

*Communities* is a forum for exploring intentional communities, cooperative living, and ways our readers can bring a sense of community into their daily lives. Contributors include people who live or have lived in community, and anyone with insights relevant to cooperative living.

Through fact, fiction, and opinion, we offer fresh ideas about how to live cooperatively, how to solve problems peacefully, and how individual lives can be enhanced by living purposefully with others. We seek contributions that profile community living and why people choose it, descriptions of what's difficult and what works well, news about existing and forming communities, or articles that illuminate community experiences—past and present—offering insights into mainstream cultural issues.

We do not intend to promote one kind of community over another, and take no official position on a community's economic structure, political agenda, spiritual beliefs, environmental issues, or decision-making style. As long as submitted articles are related to the theme of community living, we will consider them for publication. However, we do not publish articles that 1) advocate violent practices, or 2) advocate that a community interfere with its members' right to leave.

Our aim is to be as balanced in our reporting as possible, and whenever we print an article critical of a particular community, we invite that community to respond with its own perspective.

### Submissions Policy

To submit an article, please first request the Writer's Guidelines: *Communities*, 1025 Camp Elliott Rd., Black Mountain, NC 28711, 828-669-9702; [communities@ic.org](mailto:communities@ic.org).

### Advertising Policy

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### What is an "Intentional Community"?

An "intentional community" is a group of people who have chosen to live or work together in pursuit of a common ideal or vision. Most, though not all, share land or housing. Intentional communities come in all shapes and sizes, and display amazing diversity in their common values, which may be social, economic, spiritual, political, and/or ecological. Some are rural; some urban. Some live all in a single residence; some in separate households. Some raise children; some don't. Some are secular, some are spiritually based, and others are both. For all their variety though, the communities featured in our magazine hold a common commitment to living cooperatively, to solving problems nonviolently, and to sharing their experiences with others.

## PUBLISHER'S NOTE



# Sweetening Tea in China: Peak Oil and International Markets

I've been thinking about how Peak Oil might affect life at Sandhill Farm, our agrarian community in the sparsely populated northeast corner of Missouri. Sandhill supports itself by raising and selling organic food. Our principal cash crop is sorghum, from which we produce a sweet syrup traditional in the Midwest and South. We've been doing this for three decades, and our business plan has always been to produce high-quality products which we can market within our region. Not counting the odd mail-order sale shipped across country, this is what we've always done—but in the last decade we've shipped over 800 cases of sorghum to Taiwan. Let me tell you how that happened.

In the mid-1990s a representative from the Missouri Department of Agriculture got an offer from a natural food distributor in Taipei, Taiwan for 25 cases of organic sorghum from Missouri, which the state proudly passed along to us to fill.

To our surprise, our new client liked the sorghum so much they ordered 100 cases the following year, and we set about figuring out how to ship to them directly.

Knowing that a customer in Denver will pay more in postage for a quart of sorghum than they will for the syrup in the bottle, we were worried that shipping charges would add exorbitantly to the cost of a jar on the shelf in Taipei—which goes to show how little we understood the arcane world of international shipping.

While we were naïve, we weren't completely clueless. We knew a boat would be involved and we knew that boat wasn't going to be loaded in Missouri. So we called a national trucking company which operated a loading dock in Quincy, Illinois (about 60 miles from our farm), and asked for a quote to ship a pallet load of sorghum to the West Coast—where we figured the ship would be.

The trucking company said they could give us a quote all the way to Taipei. Bracing ourselves, we asked how much. The answer: \$300. For 100 cases, delivered halfway around the world. We were gob-smacked. Shipping was going to add less than 10 percent to the price of the sorghum!

### COMING IN FUTURE ISSUES

#### "Good Works: Communities in Service to Others," Summer 2006

Has your community gone out of its way to be of service in some way; for example, benefiting the environment, or helping people in need? Or have members of your community individually supported a service effort or created their own service project? Some communities (or individual community members) have supported relief efforts for tsunami victims or Katrina victims, set up soup kitchens for the homeless, or offer help to Central American political refugees. If you or your community has a story like this to tell, we'd like to share it with our readers.

*Communities*; [communities@ic.org](mailto:communities@ic.org); 828-669-9702.



We explored a little further. Reasoning that rates from a small city like Quincy might not be as competitively priced as those from a major city, we asked for rates from Chicago to Taipei, but learned it would be \$450 just to get it to Chicago. Yes, you heard that right. Shipping to Chicago (a distance of about 250 miles) was 50 percent higher than the cost to ship the exact same thing to Taipei, more than 8000 miles away.

I do know something about how transportation costs relate to markets, and when energy is relatively cheap, transportation will tend to be a higher percentage of the cost of the delivered good. Conversely, when energy is dear, it will be less of the cost. It works like this: in times of cheap energy it's more possible for goods produced far away to be price-competitive with locally produced goods. That is, it's more possible to parlay savings in production costs into a cheaper final price when shipping costs are low. The heavier the product (sorghum being an excellent example) the more this principle holds.

Cheap energy has worked in our favor to create a market for our sorghum in China. Going the other way, Sandhill also produces honey, and prices for honey have been depressed in recent years, in large part because of how much inexpensive honey is being exported from China.

***It will be more expensive to travel. The people we live with—our community—will be the ones we need to create a great life with.***

Taken all together, we are living in what our friends in China might call “interesting times.” On the one hand, we are in the Information Age. Electrons, being quite light, are substantially unaffected by rising energy costs, and it is easier all the time to ship electrons anywhere in the world. It's the miracle of the World Wide Web, and the market for information is indeed global. Concomitantly, Peak Oil warns us that cheap energy may be poised on the brink of collapse, which would have profound effects on the manufacture of physical goods and services that need to be delivered in person.

As I understand it, the Chinese ideograms for “crisis” and “opportunity” are the same. Let's look at the opportunities for community resulting from the Peak Oil crisis. First, we can anticipate a future in which there will be an increasing reliance on locally produced goods. It will be cheaper to buy things produced locally and this is likely to mean that money and jobs will stay closer to home. Higher energy costs will undercut Wal-Mart's economies of scale, and it will be easier for smaller producers to compete. This can mean a revival of viable locally owned and operated businesses, and a reversal of the fortunes of small town life.

Second, it will be more expensive to travel. Perhaps a lot more expensive. As a consequence, there will be greater incentive than at any time in my lifetime to create a full and vibrant life at home (or within biking distance). The people we live with—our community—will be the ones we need to create a great life with. Jumping in the car and going to town for a movie will be a non-trivial expense, and vacation travel will be a major investment.

Intentional communities have been working diligently on the challenges of creating high-quality, meaningful lives at home. Peak Oil probably means that this information will be more precious than ever.

Peak Oil may also mean that the days of Sandhill selling sorghum to Taiwan are numbered. Luckily, we don't depend on it. While it'll continue to be easy to email recipes for sorghum cookies, China may have to grow its own organic sorghum. Or maybe they can sweeten their tea with some of that honey they can no longer profitably dump in the US.

*Laird Schaub*

*Laird Schaub is Executive Secretary of the Fellowship for Intentional Community (publisher of this magazine), and a cofounder of Sandhill Farm community in Missouri.*



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*Jeff Grossberg*

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*Diana Christian, Elke Lerman,  
Martin Klaf, Judy Morris*

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*Laird Sandhill*

**Consensus: Decisions That  
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# What is "Nonviolence"?

To become a full member of the Federation of Egalitarian Communities, a community must demonstrate fealty to seven core principles. As the third installment of this series, I will focus on the principle which holds each community to practice nonviolence.

Certainly, nonviolence is not unique to FEC communities. Nevertheless, it remains among the values that draw our members together, including common ownership of land, labor, and other resources (the first FEC principle), and assuming responsibility for all the basic needs of the people who live in community together (the second principle).

"Nonviolence" is a word few people like, because it says what it isn't, rather than what it is. The Sanskrit word "ahimsa" suffers the same flaw: it translates literally into "non-harm." Some have proposed that we should replace nonviolence with an active and positive term, such as "peacefulness," but this has failed to catch on, perhaps because the general understanding of "peace" is too warm and fuzzy, failing to demand rigorous attention the way "nonviolence" does. In any case, Gandhi and Martin Luther King both spoke passionately and insistently on the theme of nonviolence and we've retained their language and the spirit of their plea.

Nonviolence is much more than the absence of violence. If we are to take the principle seriously, we must look to the roots of violence in community. In the first place, this involves designing systems and structures that are profoundly peaceful, so that violence cannot become systemic within the community. Second, the community needs to be attentive to the prevention of incidental (that is, nonsystemic) violence. A well-designed and highly functioning community would avoid violent episodes altogether. And, finally, the principle requires a community to attend to violent episodes when they do occur with diligence, care, and understanding.

All of this, however, begs the question of what violence actually is. A fist fight is clearly violent—but what of a loud and angry shouting match or a passive-aggressive whisper campaign to smear a fellow communitarian's reputation? Within the FEC, we have no easy answers to this question, though I imagine everyone recognizes that it's subtle, tricky territory. This is why FEC communities tend to place so much emphasis on issues related to conflict.

Conflict is not only inevitable within community, it's healthy. But the ways in which conflict arises, how it congeals into specific forms of expression, and the manner in which problems are resolved



*Parke Burgess lives at the Emma Goldman Finishing School in Seattle ([www.efgs.org](http://www.efgs.org)), and is Secretary of the FEC.*

*This is the third of seven principles guiding the Federation of Egalitarian Communities (FEC), a network of communal groups in North America valuing nonviolence, egalitarianism, and participatory decision-making. FEC communities include East Wind, Sandhill Farm, Twin Oaks, Skyhouse, Acorn, and the Emma Goldman Finishing School. For a complete list of FEC principles, see the FEC's website: [www.thefec.org](http://www.thefec.org).*

have everything to do with the principle of nonviolence.

But nonviolence runs still deeper in the marrow of FEC communities. To my mind, nonviolence is the fundament from which all the other FEC values flow. Our commitment to radical economic egalitarianism emanates from a recognition that all inequalities are ultimately enforced by violence. The same may be said about our commitment to oppose oppression, including that based on ethnicity, gender, or class. Our value around democratic forms of governance also recognizes that when power is not shared equally, the seeds of violence are

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sown. And, finally, when we abuse the environment for economic gain, we commit violent atrocities against natural systems and wildlife, not to mention future generations of people.

FEC communities are surely not alone in their intent to embody nonviolence and to model a more peaceful and wholesome lifestyle for the world to see. But the FEC is unique in the specific ways that this intent informs our economic and political structures. I wish I could say that we have perfected this model and have finally licked the problem of violence in community. We have not. The work is tricky and deep and demanding. But it's good work, and it keeps us honest and humble.

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# The “Call of the Hummingbird”

*Another report from the nomadic—“no mad” living—La Caravana Arcoíris por la Paz (Rainbow Caravan of Peace), a traveling ecovillage which uses art and theater to teach permaculture design and other sustainable living skills throughout Latin America.*

**F**arol do Cerrado, Brasília. In 2000, the Caravan was fully recognized by the Ecovillage Network of the Americas (ENA) as a new model of a “mobile ecovillage.” We were appointed as focalizers for the various nomadic projects growing in the South. One of our main tasks was to call for bioregional and international gatherings and Vision Councils, as a way to bring together local organizations within the wider spectrum of alternative movements internationally.

Since then, we held Venezuela’s first bioregional gathering, and two gatherings in Colombia: the country’s first bioregional gathering near Titiribi, and the annual meeting of ENA at Sardi Nature Reserve, a ten-year-old ecovillage in the jungles of the Darien.

In 2002 in Ecuador, we hosted a week-long “Peace Village” for women, with 144 leaders from the country’s many bioregions.

In 2003 in Peru, in the sacred valley of Urubamba and at Machu Picchu, we hosted

an international Vision Council—“The Call of the Condor”—bringing together more than 800 people from many different alternative organizations and networks in 34 nations. A full representation of both ENA and GEN (Global Ecovillage Network) representatives were present, who also held their respective annual meetings in conjunction with this event.

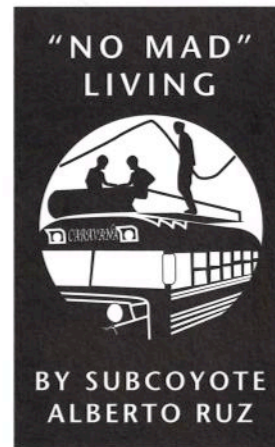
At this historic event a large and enthusiastic delegation from Brazil offered to organize another international Vision Council in their country sometime in the year 2005.

Our Caravan next spent a long season in Chile, and at the end of 2004 organized in Santiago de Chile a Vision Council—“The Call of the Rainbow”—which reunited many different Chilean alternative movements.

Early in 2005 we held another bioregional event at a botanical park in Viña del

Mar, Chile—“The Call of the Aconcagua” (named for the largest mountain in South America). We created a temporary Peace Village and drew more than 500 representatives from many different bioregions in Chile.

After this event, the Caravan began a long journey to the central state of Goias, Brazil, where the 13-day *Chamado do Bei-*



*Subcoyote Alberto Ruz can be reached at [subcoyotealberto@yahoo.com](mailto:subcoyotealberto@yahoo.com).*

*jaflor* ("Call of the Hummingbird") was planned for late September 2005.

We had huge expectations about this international Vision Council in Brazil, as we are aware that the communities movement in Brazil is far ahead of the rest of Latin America, including Mexico, and that there have been annual communities movement gatherings in for 28 years, called ENCA's.

"ENCA" is a Portuguese acronym for National Encounters of either Alternative, Anarchistic, or Arcoiris (rainbow) Communities. These free, informal gatherings began in 1978, meeting in many different Brazilian states in order to bring together people from back-to-the-land rural communities to share experiences, celebrate life, and strengthen their network, covering such topics as ecological agriculture, intentional communities, holistic health, solar energy, clean technologies, environmental activism, and inter-community trade and sustainable economies.

ENCA is part of ABRASCA, the Brazilian Association of Alternative Communities, which in its almost three decades of existence has served rural intentional communities as well as urban collectives and cooperatives in various cities of Brazil.

Besides ABRASCA, other alternative communitarian networks exist, including those identifying with ENA and GEN, the various Institutes of Permaculture, the World Peace Movement for Change of the Calendar, or with religious and spiritual communities and ashrams.

In 1998, Brazilian students of Bill Mollison—Ali Sharif, André and Fernando Soares, Carlos Miller, João Rockett, and Lucy Legan, among others—began publishing *Permacultura Brasil*, with the support of the International Permaculture Research Institute in Australia and GEN. The magazine offered important tools of change for the Brazilian communitarian network and helped connect ENCA and the more recently introduced ENA.

The organization *Rede Brasileira de Permacultura* originated from this effort, which

in turn created the regional organizations IPA (*Instituto de Permacultura da Amazônia*), IPEC (*Instituto de Permacultura e Ecovilas do Cerrado*), IPAB (*Instituto de Permacultura Austro Brasileiro*), IPEP (*Instituto de Permacultura e Ecovilas da Pampa*), IPOEMA (*Instituto de Permacultura, Ecovilas e Meio Ambiente*), and IPERS (*Instituto de Permacultura e Ecovilas do Rio do Sul*), among others.

Arriving in the Cerrado bioregion where the Call of the Hummingbird would take place, we felt even more encouraged, as the area has been a kind of Mecca for alternative groups since the '70s, when urban hippies, environmental activists, and spiritual seekers left their hometowns to create their centers, ashrams, and intentional communities in the Cerrado.

The 40-person organizing committee for the Call of the Hummingbird consisted of the Caravan; la Rede Ahimsa BusOm Ganesh, a Brazilian nomadic caravan group which presents events on behalf of the 13th Moon World Peace Movement; representatives of IPOEMA and IPERS; and our hosts, La Flor de Ouro Ecovillage in the Afro-Brazilian town of Muinho. In early September we got together, united our resources, and began setting up a temporary

ceremonial village (a Peace Village) for a thousand activists from all over the planet. We planned plenary sessions, ceremonies, workshops, Vision Councils with consensus decision-making, and multicultural and educational activities.

Representatives from hundreds of organizations from 36 different nations participated, including people from Rede Brasileira de Permacultura, ENA Brazil, ABRASCA, the South American 13 Moons Peace Movement, Vision Councils in Mexico and Spain, the Amazonian Bioregional Network, and the Santo Daime, Krishna, Rastafarian, and Osho spiritual communities. Many learned about consensus decision making for the first time, in onsite educational workshops as well as in the plenary sessions. Stronger networks and new alliances were born, and the realization that the

**The more  
diversity we  
enjoy in our  
gatherings,  
the merrier  
and richer  
they can be.**

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more diversity we enjoy in our gatherings, the merrier and richer they can be. It takes some time to learn to live with “others,” but those lessons are necessary at a time when the Matrix is destroying our inner drive towards community in pursuit of pure individualism and materialism.

At the same time, the event was challenged by extreme weather conditions, epidemics of diarrhea and skin infections, and invasions of flies and other local insects. Moreover, there was little previous experience with this kind of event in Brazil and unfortunately our promotional materials didn't clearly express its nature and purpose. Brazilians had had experience with Raves, national and international Rainbow Gatherings, Social Forums in Porto Alegre, and ENCAs, but nothing like this.

Thus hundreds of mostly young people and craft vendors filled the campgrounds, expecting to find just another big, two-week fiesta, and most were not prepared for what we offered. Not many were willing to contribute money, food, or volunteer work, but instead expected to be fed, entertained, taught, and taken care of without giving anything in return.

The event also became a great school to learn how to deal with sickness with alternative healing practices, how to deal with lack of participation in communal chores and shared self-responsibility, and alternative economic models when dealing with local merchants and producers.

In Spanish, the word “hummingbird” can be expressed as *pica flor*, to peck flowers; *chupa flor*, to suck flowers; and *besa flor*, to kiss flowers. I feel that at this gathering we had people who came to peck, to suck, or to kiss the flowers that grow in the Cerrado, reflecting our different attitudes in confronting both Nature and human relationships. Some of us peck at life, relating to others defensively, always ready to attack or to defend ourselves. Others suck, assuming that other people are there just to provide for us and satisfy our needs or desires, without our having to give anything in exchange, creating a society of dependent, arrogant parasites who devour our communal resources without thinking of either tomorrow or future generations. And some of us, unfortunately just a few, kiss—each other, leaves or trees, birds and pets, sun-

sets, deserts, high peaks and waterfalls—with our senses, our emotions, and our actions. The kissers care, and they nurture life, spread love, faith, hope, respect, and service for each other. They build a better tomorrow for all life forms based in cooperation and service.

The Vision Councils our group has held at the temporary Peace Villages reflect some of humanity's best and worst attitudes, and become living schools—the ground from which we can harvest the seeds of change we need, for our communities, workplaces, schools, the streets, our institutions, and our homes.

For almost ten years now, The Caravan has been an experimental space for many volunteers from all over the world to learn how to live more gently on the Earth and to become better-equipped keepers of the future. We have recently proposed to Brazil's National Ministry of Culture that it sponsor our Caravan on an official tour, visiting dozens of local cultural centers, sharing our values, and learning from the variety of cultural manifestations that abound in this magnificent country.

If our proposal is accepted, for the first time in a decade we will have the support of an official institution to do what we have been doing on our own all along. It is a giant leap, because it implies not only that we will get official recognition, but that other nomadic caravan projects could do the same, here and in other countries as well.

Part of our effort in this long journey across 16 countries has been to change some of the prejudices that “nomadic people” often experience, not only from official institutions, but also from people in the alternative movement as well.

In a world changing at ever-increasing speeds, new forms of nomadic activism—offering sustainable education to urban *favelas*, rural intentional communities, and indigenous traditional communities—seem not only a realistic proposal, but also a form of activism to be more developed, supported, and sustained. We encourage all *Communities* readers to consider this, and share your ideas, experiences, and suggestions with us. Good roads to you all, from the heart of Brazil.

# Everything I Needed to Know about Community Living I Learned from Harry Potter

If you're at all familiar with the *Harry Potter* books, you may already have made some connections between the community life of Hogwarts, the school attended by Harry and his wizarding friends, and intentional communities everywhere. Shared meals, shared housing, multi-dimensional interpersonal relationships, struggles about whether the organization should close down or continue, and more. Here are some community lessons we can all glean from the *Harry Potter* series.

From *Hermione*: Sometimes the most effective and skilled communitarians come from Muggle (non-community) families.

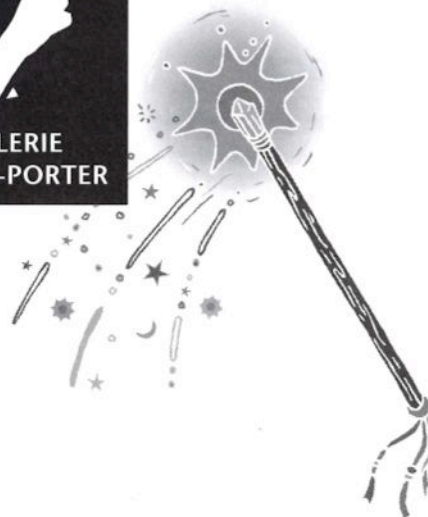
From *Dumbledore*: Make it a lifelong habit to believe the best of all of those around us.

From *Voldemort* (a.k.a. "He Who Cannot Be Named"): Not naming negative things only results in giving them more power and increases our fear of them.

From *Hagrid*: Those who appear superficially the least competent often have other gifts to offer.

From *Fawkes, the Phoenix*: The presence of tears is sometimes what's needed for true healing to emerge.

From *Harry Potter* himself: Being connected through loving each other is one of the strongest powers we can draw upon in our time of need.



Valerie Renwick-Porter has lived at Twin Oaks community for 14 years. She has read all the Harry Potter books at least twice.

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**For more information on the Village Building Convergence 2006, you can go to [www.cityrepair.org/vbc](http://www.cityrepair.org/vbc) or call City Repair at (503) 235-8946.**





GRAHAM MELTZER

*The center of the circle is the place to express one's emotional reality at the time.*

# ZEGG FORUM

*Does transparent truth-telling and “performance art”  
create more harmony and connection in groups?*

**I**n November 2005, we attended a five-day course on the fundamental principles and practices of the ZEGG Forum, at ZEGG community near Belzig, Germany. (ZEGG is a German acronym for Center for Experimental Cultural Design.)

The Forum is a communication process developed and refined at ZEGG over 25 years, which addresses issues of trust, transparency, love, and human nature; ZEGG members consider it a critical component of their “community glue.” We were both so moved and inspired by the experience that we invited our instructors, long-time Forum teachers Achim Ecker and Ina Meyer-Stoll, to teach two- to six-day Forum courses in English to interested communities and organizations in the US this May and June. Here’s how and why the experience moved us so much, first from Thea and then from Graham.

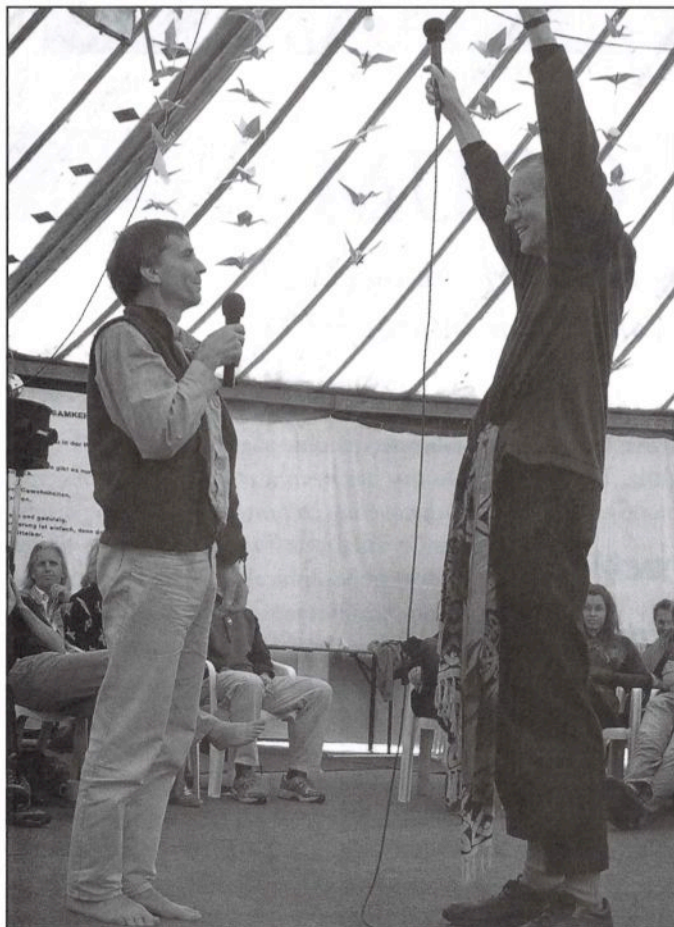
***Their interactions  
exuded a warmth and  
camaraderie that was  
quite palpable.***

*Thea’s Story.* For the last six and a half years I’ve lived at Twin Oaks, a large, well-established income-sharing commune in Virginia. For me, community has been a personal and collective process of creating and discovering common values among diverse individuals, as Twin Oaks is one of the more philosophically diverse groups in the communities movement. During my years here, I’ve sought to understand the essential unity that underlies all the daily rituals that make up our communal life—our work, our self-governance, our play, our art, and our support systems. Many of us are perpetually engaged in a quest for deepening trust and refining a common vision together, and several of us are currently exploring the ZEGG Forum, which addresses issues of trust, transparency, love, and human nature.

The Forum is not a process for decision-making or problem-solving, but for exploring emotional, interpersonal, and archetypal

truths by groups who share a common culture or wish to create one. It's people coming together to rediscover the truth of their experiences, within the larger context of their shared collective vision. First, people gather in a large circle, led by a facilitator. There can be as few as ten people or as many as 100. Then someone who feels moved to do so goes into the "stage" or middle of the circle in order to express their emotional reality at that time—whatever is authentic, alive, and true for them in the moment. The facilitator encourages the person to express themselves in physical movement, song, dance, words, or by simply fully "being" in the feelings and thoughts of what is happening for them. After the first person has finished, other people also come into the middle to express appreciations and "mirrors"—their own unique perceptions of what they observed of that person during his or her time in the middle. The process lasts for about 90 minutes, and there is usually time for about three people to go into the middle.

When I went in the middle, it was challenging to see how others saw me in a particular context and to understand how it sometimes differed from my own self-perceptions. I found myself habitually identifying personally with the feedback, judging myself, or wanting to dismiss or discount others. Our instruc-



*The facilitator encourages the person in the center to express themselves in physical movement, song, dance, or words.*

***In an atmosphere of transparency and authenticity, one's capacity for love and compassion is greatly expanded.***

tors, Achim and Ina, asked us to experiment with consciously shifting our perspective to include ourselves in the greater historical and cultural evolution of humankind. Experiencing the process in this way, I became more and more aware that each person who went into the middle was telling my story as well as their own. On this universal and intimate human stage, we were tapping into a collective intelligence, which can guide us in creating a more loving future together.

My first taste of the Forum came earlier in the year via the Network for a New Culture, an American organization that hosts a Summer Intensive Camp in the tradition of ZEGG on each coast every summer. At the Summer Camp Intensive I found myself deeply moved by the power of the process to bring people into a place of profound sharing, unity, and trust. I kept thinking to myself both at Summer Camp and during the course at ZEGG, "If the Forum can create this sense of community among relative strangers, imagine the possibilities among people sharing a life together!"

*Graham's Story.* I am a social researcher and part-time communal dweller from Australia. For me, the essence of a community is found in the interpersonal relationships of its members. A cohesive and successful community will invariably have social relations of a relatively high quality. The exact nature of that quality will vary from group to group according to their circumstances and aspirations. My ideal community would be one committed to developing open-hearted and authentic ("no bullshit") relationships. In other words, the group works hard over a long period of time to establish a clear, if not transparent, means of communication amongst its members.

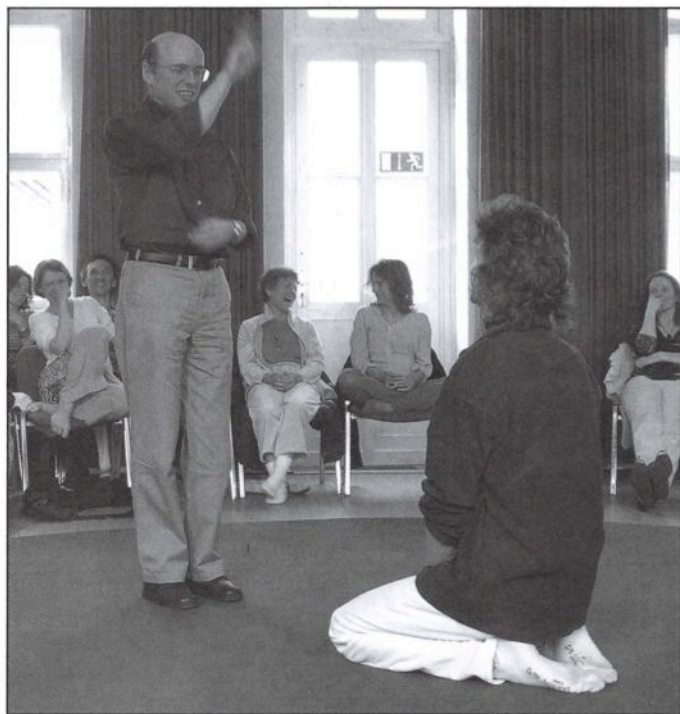
This is a tall order, of course. There are not that many intentional communities of the past or the present that have held such an aspiration as a central tenet, however ZEGG does hold these aspirations. I first visited ZEGG in 2001 for a conference. Immediately upon arriving, my sociologist's radar for social phenomena picked up something quite extraordinary. Whenever any two members came together in some form of interaction (even the most perfunctory) they appeared to engage with total authenticity. Furthermore, their interactions exuded a warmth and camaraderie that was quite palpable.

As a long-time communal dweller, and over the last 15 years as a researcher/writer, I have spent time in perhaps a hundred different intentional communities. Yet, never before had I witnessed such intimacy of engagement—at least, not within a secular community. I'm sure there are many religious groups and others with charismatic leaders that might exhibit a similar degree of social bonding. In a way, ZEGG's ideology and practices constitute a kind of religion, or perhaps more accurately, a kind of spirituality. They believe in the power of open-hearted communication as a means of transforming personal and collective consciousness and in being mindful or meditative in everything they do, and they

believe that even the most mundane work is considered “love in action”—all clearly spiritual beliefs and practices.

Since that first visit, I have returned to ZEGG annually, either for a Summer Camp or a workshop. Every time, I feel moved and inspired by the experience—finding that my capacity for creativity, intelligence, and pure joy are powerfully expanded. In an infectious atmosphere of open-heartedness, I experience newfound levels of love and compassion for those I meet (and also those I don't meet). Were it not for the fact that I don't speak German, I feel sure that I would be living at ZEGG today. As it is, I am moving to Findhorn in March 2006, where I know that many of the same attributes, qualities, and practices can also be found. Nowadays, as it happens, ZEGG and Findhorn are closely allied and members often travel between them. The Forum is now practiced within the Findhorn Foundation, with the encouragement and support of the ZEGG community.

In November 2005, I went to ZEGG for my annual “fix” of open-hearted communication and sharing. This time I decided to attend a Forum course—in fact two consecutive courses: Forum I and Forum II. The experience of each was quite different. However, the single most outstanding feature of both was the manner in which the group of about 15 participants became a community. We arrived as strangers, yet within a very short time our relationships had assumed an inti-



One is much less likely to feel bored or judgmental toward someone expressing their truth.



“Each person who went into the middle was telling my story as well as their own.”  
Facilitator Achim Ecker (left).

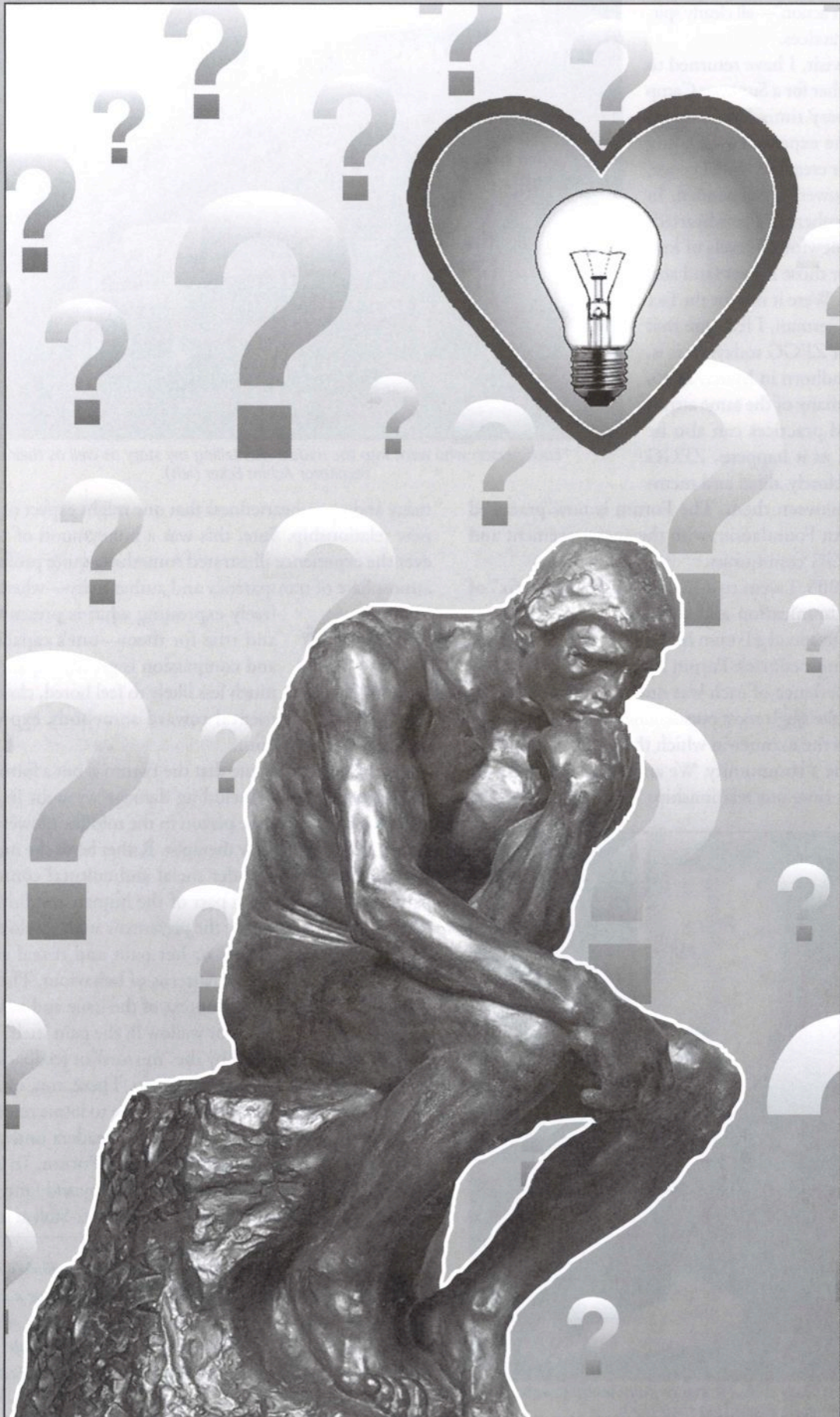
## The Forum is not a form of therapy.

macy and open-heartedness that one might expect of an exciting new relationship. Sure, this was a honeymoon of sorts! However the experience illustrated something quite profound. In an atmosphere of transparency and authenticity—where people are freely expressing what is presently essential and true for them—one's capacity for love and compassion is greatly expanded. One is much less likely to feel bored, closed, or judgmental toward somebody expressing and standing for their truth.

It is important to note that the Forum is not a form of therapy. Deep personal pain, including damage wrought in childhood, is often expressed by the person in the middle. However the facilitator's role is not to play therapist. Rather he or she might remind the presenter of the wider social and cultural context of such pain—its universality as part of the human condition. Or else, the facilitator might bring the presenter's attention to the present-day manifestation of his or her pain and reveal actions and reactions which reinforce patterns of behaviour. The purpose is generally to focus on the context of the issue and not encourage the presenter to dwell on or wallow in the pain itself. This intention is further reinforced by the “mirrors” or feedback offered by various other members of the group. These, too, offer different frameworks or worldviews within which to locate one's own issue.

We hope this helps Communities readers understand why we are so enthusiastic about the ZEGG Forum. To learn where Achim and Ina will teach in the US this May and June, or to invite them to teach in your area, contact Ina Meyer-Stoll at [ina@zegg.de](mailto:ina@zegg.de).

*Thea Tupelo is passionately engaged in integrating children into the heart of community life. She is currently working on developing a Forum culture at Twin Oaks. Graham Meltzer is an architect and author of the book Sustainable Community: Learning from the Cohousing Model. He lives at Findhorn, Scotland. [www.grahammeltzer.com](http://www.grahammeltzer.com). Ina Meyer-Stoll and Achim Ecker: [www.zegg.de](http://www.zegg.de).*



DARREN MCMANUS/JOHN MORRIS

# WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN...?

What burning questions about conflict in community would you ask an experienced process and communications consultant?

Below, four well-known consensus trainers and community process consultants answer our readers' questions.

**Q** One of our members sometimes interrupts, yells at, and "talks over" others in meetings. He says he wants us to have the freedom to express anger however we like because he sees it as psychologically healthy, and he'd like the rest of us to feel free to yell too, because he wants us to be more emotionally expressive and less polite.

Some agree with this view; others find his anger too much to deal with, and feel angry, weary, or hopeless. "Asking him not to do this doesn't do any good; we've tried it before," people say. When someone calls him on it he usually gets angrier. Once when the person calling him on his behavior was a newcomer, he has told them later he would block their membership (but he didn't). Sometimes people try to be emotionally honest in meetings and say they feel scared when he yells. If they ask him to stop, it seems to make him angrier. Sometimes he suggests they get therapy for their timidity. (We don't have ground rules for meeting behavior in our community.)

The paradox is that he's actually a good meeting facilitator himself and supports our efforts to learn better communication skills as a community. He cares about fairness, and probably doesn't want to be a "power over" person. But some people here aren't willing to disagree with him in meetings even when he just seems to be growing impatient, and he shows his impatience easily. So policies or proposals he wants for the community often get approved because even if others don't agree, they don't speak up—thus he ends up with "power over." How would you handle this?"

—Name and community withheld by request



Tree Bressen responds:

It sounds like talking about the pattern with this person while it's happening doesn't work, that he is too worked up to be able to listen to others' needs, which is not uncommon with anger. What about talking with him outside of those times? You might

be able to arrive at an agreement which can then be invoked during charged moments.

Your member's belief in fairness and genuine desire not to use power-over sound like a key leverage point to me. They

allow you to say, "I know you have this value of fairness, and I care about it and you care about it, and I think you are not living up to it in this particular way, and that doesn't serve you or me or the community."

You might even add something like: "I get it that honest emotional expression is important to you, and in fact it's important to me too. When you are overcome with anger in meetings and start yelling, what I see happen is that other people cease to be honest, and if they do try to be honest you don't accept their

**Your member's belief in fairness and genuine desire not to use power-over sound like a key leverage point.**

truth. You might think they should change, but why should they change and you shouldn't, what gives you the authority to say how everyone should be? Furthermore, even if they 'should' change, I don't know that they realistically will. And in the meantime they are shut down by your behavior, we lose access to their good thinking and are cut off from their part of the wisdom in our group—and I don't think that's healthy for community decision-making."

Another idea is to offer this member an opportunity to express his emotions before he reaches the boiling-over point. What if you invited him to express himself when you notice him starting to feel impatient, rather than waiting for the explosion?

Are there places in your community culture where strong emotions, including anger, can be legitimately expressed?

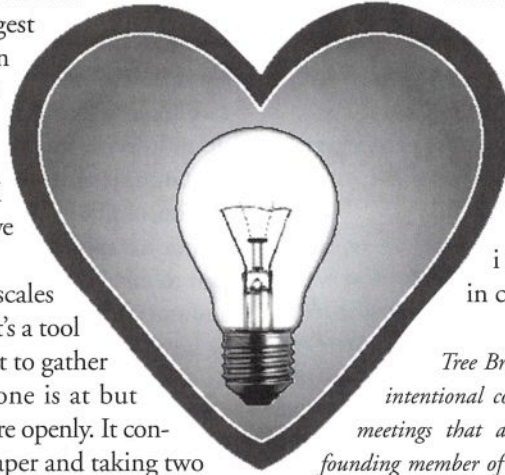
Can you imagine a way this person could express genuine anger with all its associated charge that you think would work for you and others in the group?

What archetypal role is this person playing for the group? What do you realistically think would happen if he moved out? What piece of the truth is he carrying?

Karla McLaren in her book *Emotional Genius* calls anger "the Honorable Sentry." She says that the gifts of anger include honor, proper boundaries, healthy detachment, conviction, and protection (of oneself and others), and that the questions to ask when anger arises are: "What must be protected? What must be restored?"

It sounds like in the moment when these incidents happen what your group needs is a strong facilitator, someone who won't get the "deer in the headlights" glaze and who can meet the angry person's energy level. The goal is to both honor the needs he is expressing and hold space for the rest of the group. As in dealing with most emotional expressions, start with reflective listening—give feedback that lets him hear that people heard him. After that, again I suggest invoking fairness, as it sounds like the person strongly believes in that value. When he starts talking over someone else, the "fairness doctrine" allows a facilitator to say, "OK, you've had your say; it is not OK to interrupt others who are now going to have their say too."

Another possibility is to build shelter scales or surveys into your meeting culture. That's a tool facilitators sometimes use when they want to gather honest information about where everyone is at but don't believe people feel safe enough to share openly. It consists of passing out index cards or scrap paper and taking two minutes for everyone present to write down an answer to a question the facilitator poses, such as: "On a scale of 1 to 10, how safe are you feeling right now?" or "What issues do you think this group needs to address that aren't being dealt with?" People also have the option to pass in blank pieces of paper, i.e. if nothing is up for them.



Threatening to block someone's membership does sound suspiciously like bullying or power-over, and ignoring that doesn't sound healthy for the community. If you approach the person and he isn't willing or able to have a constructive conversation with you about it, you might need to invoke a heavier level of feedback, like having a delegation of several people request a meeting with him about it.

Overall, if other people put up with bad behavior (whether it's not following a community agreement, not contributing adequately to community work, or letting someone repeatedly run over them in a meeting), then they are co-creating that behavior. Since we've all got our blind spots, I think part of the responsibility we take on in community is helping each other see them.

*Tree Bressen is a group process consultant who works with intentional communities and other nonprofits on how to have meetings that are lively, productive, and connecting. She is a founding member of Walnut St. Co-op in Eugene, Oregon, which celebrated its fifth anniversary in the fall. Her website, [www.treegroup.info](http://www.treegroup.info), offers free tools and resources. [tree@ic.org](mailto:tree@ic.org).*

*(Tree uses lower-case 'i' in her articles "in order to make real through language the idea that i am a part of the dance of community no larger or smaller than any other part.")*

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*Laird Schaub responds:*

I think your best chance for a constructive solution is to cast this as a group issue. Nobody wants to shut down others; yet everyone wants to have a sense that they can be themselves. Where styles clash, this isn't so easy.

In the second instance, based on your assessment that this member cares greatly about the community and has respect for group process, I suggest approaching him one-on-one to discuss your perception of his impact on the group when he's freely expressing his anger. I would affirm that he has a right to express his anger on topics relevant to the group, yet raise the question of its effectiveness (the key point here is

***I'd invite his thoughts about how to balance his need to be fully expressive with others' need to feel safe.***

not that he is expressing anger, but how he is expressing his anger). If people are afraid of his expression of anger, there is likely to be considerable distortion around what people think he is saying when he is angry or perceived to be likely to be angry. When the distortion is significant, the group ceases to function well and everyone loses.

It sounds like this person understands that not everyone is comfortable with wide-open anger, and I'd invite his thoughts about how to balance his need to be fully expressive with others' need to feel safe. Assuming you get a positive response to this approach, I'd widen the conversation at your earliest convenience to include those who feel intimidated by the angry outbursts, to get everyone's involvement in the question of what can work for everyone.

Finally, I'd stay completely away from any psychological analysis of why he has this pattern. Stick with what's working and not working for the group.

*Laird Schaub, a member of Sandhill Farm community in Missouri, has been doing consulting work on group process since 1987. A longtime activist in community networking, he has lived in community since 1974 and been involved with the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) since 1986; he is currently its Executive Secretary. laird@ic.org; 660-883-5545.*



*Beatrice Briggs responds:*

Take One: I suggest taking a 15-minute break when these explosions occur. This will permit those who cannot handle the emotional energy to leave the room if they want to. Others can stay and listen to, support or otherwise engage with the angry member. The idea is not to ostracize or isolate the person, but

at the same time, not force everyone to be held hostage by their outbursts. When the break is over, bring the group back together (recognizing that some may chose not to return) and try to get the meeting back on track, summarizing the "exploder's" point of view. If the person is still upset and wants to continue the harangue, firmly insist that they are out of order and that others

***I suggest that the group adopt "No interrupting" and "No yelling" ground rules.***

are entitled to an opportunity to speak. This requires courage on the part of the facilitator and discipline on the part of the whole group, but even in the absence of specific norms regarding "acceptable behavior," the principle is clear: everyone is allowed to speak but no one is allowed to dominate.

Take two: Interrupting and yelling may be acceptable in some families and cathartic in certain therapeutic situations, but in a community business meeting, they are entirely counterproductive. If this person is "a good meeting facilitator," he should know this. I suggest that the group adopt "No interrupting" and "No yelling" ground rules—and enforce them. If being overly polite is a real issue, perhaps a "Discuss the undiscussable" ground rule would help open things up.

*Beatrice Briggs is the director of the International Institute for Facilitation and Consensus, a professional team of consultants and trainers with affiliates in 12 countries, and author of Introduction to Consensus. Beatrice lives in Ecovillage Huehucocoyotl, near Tepoztlán, Mexico and travels extensively giving workshops and facilitating participatory processes in English and Spanish. bbriggs@iifac.org; www.iifac.org.*



*Caroline Estes responds:*

This question has many parts to it and it would take some space to adequately address all of them. However, to at least name some of them might help.

1. The group as a whole needs to have some meeting behavior agreements, despite this individual's probable aversion to same. Perhaps differentiating between business meetings and sharing meetings, (what we at Alpha Farm call "Third Meetings"). Without a legitimate place to express anger, frustration, or disappointment, these emotions can build up and explode at inappropriate times.

2. The individual is occasionally using the group as his "therapist," which is quite unfair unless the group has agreed to perform this function—and it sounds as if they have not, at least not other than by acquiescing to it informally.

3. By not instituting any agreements about meeting behavior, and by letting this person run roughshod over them, the other members are endangering the health of the community itself.

Remember that a block is not valid if it is motivated solely by the blocker's personal feelings; it must be due to a true vision of danger to the community itself as a result of taking the action being discussed. Thus, just because this person might

**The individual is occasionally using the group as his "therapist."**

try to block meeting behavior agreements does not mean he could do so unless he could show real danger to the community arising from the proposed agreements. Therefore there can be nothing to lose, and possibly much to gain, by proposing such communication agreements.

*Caroline Estes, cofounder of Alpha Farm community in Oregon and Alpha Institute, which teaches consensus and offers facilitation services, has been teaching and facilitating consensus for more than 40 years. Caroline has taught consensus to most intentional community-based facilitators in North America (including the three facilitators in this article), and works with Hewlett-Packard, University of Massachusetts, US Green Party, and the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, and many other organizations. db@peak.net.*

Here is a related question, which our experts will address in the Summer '06 issue:

**Q** *A person with a very powerful presence asserts her views in such a way that the supposed consensus of the group is really just her agenda. The rest of us feel dissatisfied much of the time with "group" decisions (although the powerful member is so skilled at getting her way that sometimes we don't realize until after the fact what has happened). What can we do?*

—Deborah Altus,  
Lawrence, Kansas

*If you have questions for these process and facilitation experts, send them to communities@ic.org, c/o "Ask the Experts." (We won't print your name or community if you wish.) Thank you!*

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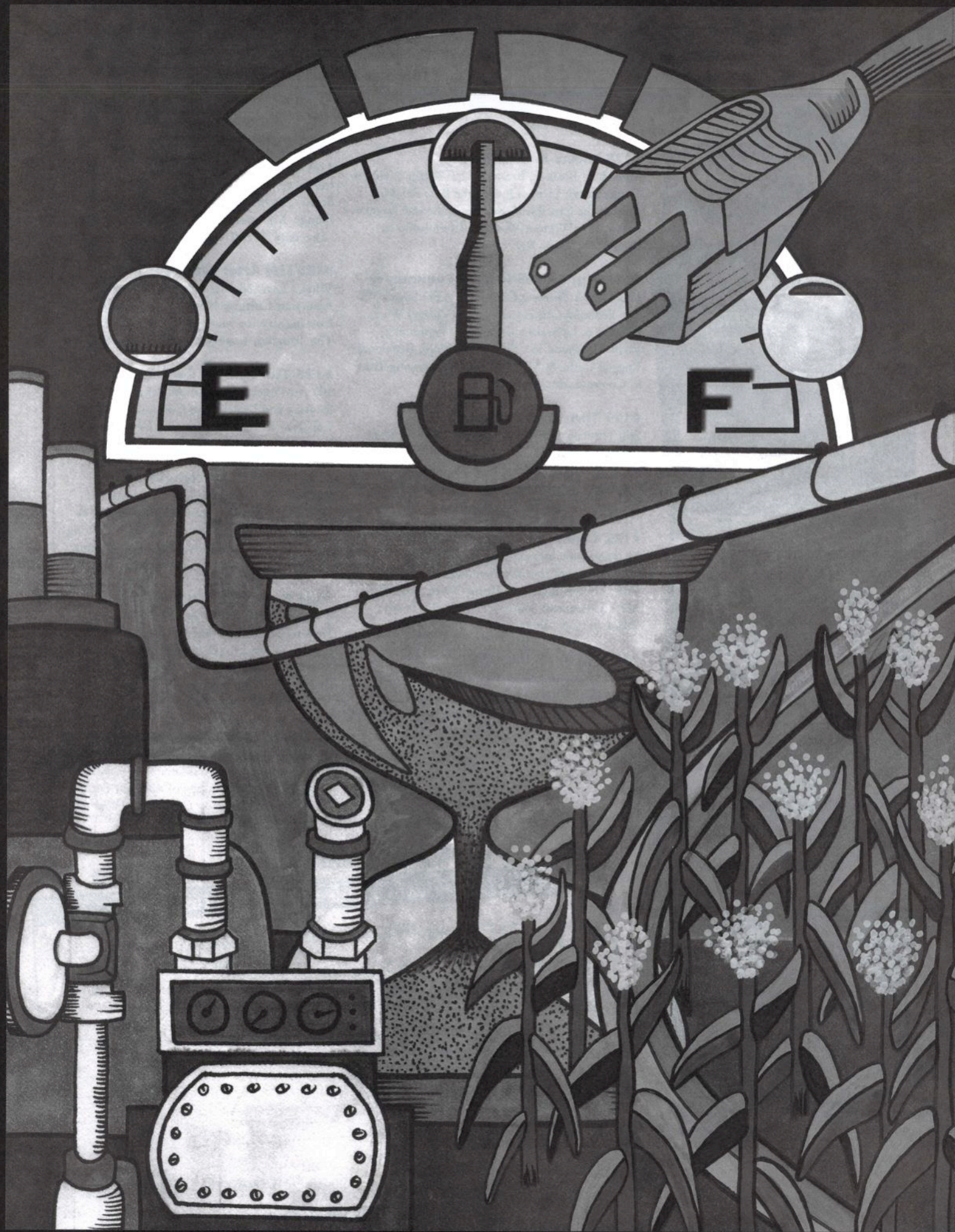


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#130



# COMMUNITY SURVIVAL DURING THE COMING ENERGY DECLINE

Imagine community life in a world with increasingly scarce and expensive fossil fuel—oil, coal, and natural gas. Imagine ever-scarce and expensive prices for everything—from food to manufactured goods to services—and imagine that we’re entering this period now.

“Well, we’ve got off-grid power from solar panels and wind power,” a community might say, “and we’ve got wood stoves, too. No matter how high the price of gas goes, we’ll be fine.”

Perhaps, but does the community buy any food items they don’t grow themselves? While its members can certainly bicycle, car-pool, or use biodiesel to get to the local food co-op, are any of these food items grown, processed, or packaged in other regions? If so, they’ll pay for the ever-increasing cost of transporting these items into their area. The same is true if the community uses local suppliers for seeds, soil amendments, fencing, hand tools, or other gardening supplies that originate elsewhere, or building supplies from other regions—from lumber to cement blocks to electrical supplies and PVC pipe.

But this is only considering the rising price of *gasoline*. It’s harder to grasp, but equally true, that the cost of all manufactured goods *themselves* will steadily

increase in price—because manufactured goods are tied to the price of oil. Why? First there’s the electricity used in factories to manufacture things: the electric power

in most regions of the world is generated in power plants fueled by non-renewable fossil fuel such as oil and coal. Second, there’s the use of metal in manufactured items, which must be mined, smelted, and formed into parts—all of which requires electrical power. The

same is true of rubber, machine oil, glass, and other materials used in manufactured goods—not to mention the silicon used in items from solar panels to computer chips. Third, there’s the plastic used in manufactured items themselves and the plastic used in the packaging and shipping of such items—since plastic itself is made from oil.

**We are very near—  
if not already past—  
that crucial mid-  
point for petroleum.**

**We are at Peak Oil.**

## Potable Water



Drinkable water, like this at Skyhouse at Dancing Rabbit in Missouri (above), is perhaps the most important necessity to find alternative sources of if prices rise astronomically for the pumped water of municipal water systems, or if those systems fail altogether. In areas with enough rainfall, some use roof-water catchment (middle). This requires roofing materials that won’t negatively impact the water, such as metal roofs, as in this home at Earthaven Ecovillage in North Carolina. Roof-water catchment is currently illegal in some Western states. Although water storage tanks can be metal or plastic, they can also be built onsite of ferro-cement, like this one, which gravity-feeds a sink inside the house at Earthaven (below).

AMY SEIDEN

## Food



LAURA MILLER



SILKE HAGMAIER

Food is already becoming increasingly expensive. Some intentional communities, like Lost Valley Educational Center in Oregon (above), grow much of their own produce with several organic gardens and a greenhouse. In a CSA farm, like the 10-acre West Haven CSA farm at EcoVillage at Ithaca (2nd), people buy shares of produce ahead of time each season, which both finances the farmer and provides customers fresh organic produce during the growing season. Most CSA farms are not large enough to grow sufficient grains to meet their customers' needs for carbohydrates, but they could grow high-carb foods such as potatoes and squash. In the grass-rotational pasturage system, like one in operation at Earthaven (3rd), a cow, sheep, or goats, are moved around a pasture in moveable pens, followed by moveable pens of chickens or other fowl, producing milk, eggs, and meat. Some say this is the most efficient use of agricultural land, as it yields the most food per acre and requires less work for the farmer than growing vegetables. Draft horses, like this one in the Club 99 neighborhood at Sieben Linden in Germany (below), offer an alternative to fossil fuel-powered farming.

What happens when a community's wind turbine or inverter needs a new part? Most likely its members are used to picking up a mouse or a phone, finding the part hundreds or thousands of miles away, performing an electronic transaction that depends on the fossil-fuel-powered infrastructures of electricity, telecommunications, and banking, and then a large brown truck—powered by fossil fuel—brings the part in a week or so. But with the coming energy decline it won't be so easy.

And even if the community did happen to have an "Off-Grid Power Parts 'R Us" franchise nearby, does that store actually mine the copper, aluminum, iron, tin, cobalt, antimony, beryllium, niobium, and various other metals that they smelt, forge, and extrude into wind turbine or inverter parts? Do they have equally basic methods for obtaining any rubber, plastic, glass, or silicon required for these parts? And if they do happen to have such parts on hand, their seeming availability just masks the dependence on fossil-fuel-driven infrastructure that goes to the very core of our civilization.

Well, you get the picture. But there's more. Many rural communities are already growing at least some of their own food, but outside of the tiny percentage of food that's organically grown, the entire food industry (and thus, the world's burgeoning population) is totally dependent on fossil fuel. That's because most non-organic fertilizer is either made from the byproducts of refining oil or from natural gas. As a civilization, we are literally *eating* fossil fuel, from the natural gas that produces virtually all commercial fertilizer; to the diesel farm machinery that prepares the land, weeds the crops, and harvests and distributes the yield; to the energy-intensive processing, packaging, and distribution networks that get the food to us.

All told, about ten calories of fossil fuel goes into each single calorie of food we eat (not counting fuel used for cooking).

And make that ratio at least 100:1 for heavily processed foods.

So agribiz-grown food (even though we communitarians don't eat it), heating oil for home furnaces (even though we choose renewable heating sources), manufactured goods (even though we eschew most of them), and transportation fuel (even though we car-pool or bicycle), all affect the greater economy. And most ecovillages and intentional communities are embedded to some degree in the greater economy—whether we intend it or not—and the greater economy is completely driven by fossil fuel. And it's not just the economy—it's almost everything we take for granted in our lives: modern medicine (antibiotics, anesthetics, insulin,

**As the price of oil  
and natural gas  
goes up, everything  
will become  
more expensive.**

glasses, hearing aids); holistic medicine (nutritional supplements, Chinese herbs); communications (telephone lines, electronic switching equipment, satellite dishes, satellites themselves, computers, networks, modems, servers); law and order (police cars, police communication systems,

police officers' salaries), the ability to govern—these are but a few examples of non-obvious things we take for granted that are totally dependent on fossil fuel.

This means, of course, that as the supplies of fossil fuel become more scarce, and the price of oil and natural gas goes up, *everything* will become more expensive. As the economy worsens, many businesses will severely downsize or even shut down because they can no longer afford parts, repairs, or needed services. Thousands of people, then tens of thousands, then hundreds of thousands, will lose their jobs. Thus while living in an ecovillage or other kind of intentional community or a sustainably organized neighborhood may make us less reliant on the typical energy sources and commercial products of mainstream life, it is not automatic protection from the coming energy decline. The Great Depression of the 1930s and the gasoline shortages of the 1970s were just warm-up acts for what

is coming—the permanent, irrevocable decline of fossil fuel.

And it will impact those of us living in intentional communities—whether or not we grow our own food or are off the grid.

Now, let's take a look at what is meant by the concept of Peak Oil itself.

## Peak Oil

"But I heard that there is at least as much oil available as we've used already—we've only used about half," you might say. "Things can't be so dire."

You're right—we aren't "running out of oil" just yet. But it is not so simple as that. People think of petroleum like they think of their car's gas tank, with an "E" on the left, an "F" on the right, and a pointer that is currently somewhere near the middle. But the way fossil energy *really* works is that it follows a classic bell-shaped curve: a small amount of available energy starts out being fairly cheap, then we figure out how to make use of the most easily available, cheapest sources, and quickly use them up. Then at the mid-point, all the cheap energy is gone and the "second half" takes increasingly more effort to produce, even as the total amount produced declines year after year.

We are very near—if not already past—that crucial mid-point for petroleum. We are at Peak Oil.

The concept of peak resource depletion means that energy will continue to get increasingly expensive, and at a fairly rapid rate. Post-peak oil shortage estimates, *at current consumption levels*, range from four percent to eight percent annually—this means that the available fossil fuel will be reduced *by half* every 10 to 20 years. Thus the cost of oil will continue increasing at a rate that is much greater than the rate of decline of its availability, since there are so many more of us living now than there were during the 150 years in which we've used up the first half our fossil-fuel supply. When demand outpaces supply for something so essential, chaotic swings in prices will make

simple price prediction impossible. These huge swings will bankrupt many people—and make some oil companies very rich.

Plus, demand *is* rising. Not only are people in the Western world demanding more oil, but China and India are developing voracious appetites for energy. They want the lifestyle that cheap energy has given so-called developed nations for the past 50 or so years. Modern civilization's existence is predicated upon ever-increasing economic growth—and such growth simply cannot continue indefinitely in a system with finite fossil fuel and timber resources, like Planet Earth.

"But there's a 200-year supply of coal, at today's consumption levels!" There's that bugbear: *at today's consumption level*.

We need to look at the rate of total energy *recovered* over the amount of energy *used up* to make reasonable predictions. For example, it originally took one barrel of oil to create the equivalent of 100 barrels of oil worth of

energy, but currently it takes about 20 barrels of oil to create the same amount of energy—and the ratio is steadily getting worse. When petroleum and natural gas go into decline, there will be pressure to make up for their missing energy, and there's talk of coal gasification and liquefaction to replace the gas and oil, so coal will be consumed much faster than it is today. So even if using coal gets us over the crisis of Peak Oil and Peak Gas, a child born today will still have to endure Peak Coal in her lifetime (not to mention the ghastly environmental impacts of burning coal on such an enormous scale). Humanity will eventually have to learn to live within the planet's energy budget: i.e., the energy falling on the Earth's surface from the Sun.

Likewise, none of the renewable sources available can allow us to continue our energy gluttony *at today's consumption level*. You can't just pave the entire desert Southwest with solar cells, or turn several Midwest states and provinces into biofuel farms, or clutter every inch of our coastlines with huge wind turbines—the energy input to do so is too great. We're measuring the ratio

## Shelter



As energy declines and building materials become increasingly expensive to transport or manufacture, people requiring new construction will probably build small, multi-functional passive-solar dwellings with locally available materials, like the strawbale cabins with lime plaster at Dancing Rabbit Ecovillage in Missouri (above) or this tiny timber-framed hut at Earthaven, with clay-straw walls and clay and lime plaster (below).

## Keeping Warm



As heating oil, natural gas, and propane become increasingly expensive, more people will probably turn to wood heat, like this resident of Earthaven (above). Probably the most efficient way to stay warm is to start off with passive-solar home design, like these strawbale homes at EcoVillage at Ithaca (below).

## Cooking



TONY SIRNA



ALEJANDRA CARDERO



TAMMY DAVIS

A home-made wood-fired cook stove at Dancing Rabbit, made of bricks and mortar, offers both stove-top and oven cooking (above). A clay and earth-plastered horno oven, like this one at Ness community in New York (2nd), uses an initial wood fire and thermal mass to bake bread. Cooking doesn't necessarily require fuel, as the next two photos illustrate. In areas sunny enough to use solar cookers (3rd), most meals will probably be cooked once or twice a day, when sunlight is more available. "Haybox" cookers, like this one at Lost Valley Educational Center (below), can save 20 to 80 percent of cooking fuel by providing steady heat for hours. The pot of heated food is placed inside a box, thickly insulated with straw or other insulative material, and cooks in its own juices.

of the total energy recovered to the total energy we're using up—you have to get more out of it than you put into it. For example, Cornell University has studied current ethanol production, and determined that each unit of ethanol energy requires 117 percent of fossil fuel energy to produce. So using ethanol fuel doesn't really help anything—in fact, it hurts.

This isn't to say that we should not try to use any and all renewable energy sources in a responsible way; it's simply that *nothing* can maintain our current energy gluttony, and the future is one of increasingly expensive and precious energy—no matter the source.

"But at least we've got our wood heat," a community might say. "At least *that's* renewable!" Yes, but for how long, and at what cost? Throughout history, civilizations have gotten into deep trouble by "timber mining" at unsustainable levels. The Greeks, for example, once lived on fertile forested mountains and islands. After centuries of logging their forests for homes, ship-building, and firewood, they used up their timber resources, the forests did not grow back, and Greece became the relatively arid landscape it still is today. It is only since the availability of fossil fuel in the mid-1850s that the population on every inhabited continent has been able to grow much larger without disastrous timber harvests.

If the price of the natural gas that heats many of the homes in North America goes up by a factor of ten, how many trees are going to be left standing when people start burning every tree in sight just to stay warm? (And, in such a case, who will be able to breathe the air?) Keep in mind that there are about ten times the number of people on the planet now as there were when humanity last depended entirely on wood for energy!

Although things look bleak for current generations, Peak Oil offers humanity an opportunity to learn and prepare for the inevitable Peak Coal that will impact gen-

erations to come. It's too late to hope for a pleasant decline from Peak Oil, but if we pay attention, humanity may choose to plan for a long and orderly Peak Coal.

## Is Intentional Community the Answer?

Julian Darley, author of *High Noon for Natural Gas* and founder of the Post Carbon Institute, believes civilization is necessarily headed down the path of "re-localization"; that is, reversing the energy-fed globalization trend that has wracked the Earth for the past century or so. Those who already enjoy a measure of self-sufficiency, such as ecovillages and other kinds of sustainable intentional communities and sustainably organized neighborhoods, will

already have the skills and experience needed for re-localization.

"This is a time of tremendous challenge," says Richard Heinberg, author of *The Party's Over* and *Powerdown*, "but also a time of great opportunity." In *Powerdown*, Heinberg notes that small, self-sustaining communities may become cultural lifeboats in times to

come. "Our society is going to change profoundly—those of us who understand this are in a position to steward that change. We are going to become popular, needed people in our communities." When asked at a Peak Oil conference in 2005 about what can be done, Heinberg replied, "Start an ecovillage!"

[But see "Peak Oil as 'Opportunity'? A critique of the Ecovillage Response to the Growing Energy Famine," pg. 48.]

These changes are not going to happen overnight. James Howard Kunstler, author of *The Long Emergency*, calls the coming energy decline a "long emergency" because it is occurring almost too gradually for most of us to register. The energy decline is often compared to the metaphor about boiling frog: if you want to cook frogs and you put them in boiling water, they will immediately hop out, but if you put frogs in room-temperature water and only

**Is it better to be widely connected with one's neighbors and bioregion, or isolated and inaccessible?**

gradually turn up the heat, the frogs will stay in the water—not noticing it's gradually getting warmer—and slowly cook to death.

We could say this is happening to our civilization at large. Most of us have a vague feeling that things in general are getting worse, but from minute-to-minute, day-to-day, and even year-to-year, the worsening is not enough to get us to change our energy-consuming ways.

The Trends Research Institute, a network of interdisciplinary experts who forecast developing trends, echoes Darley's prediction for "re-localization." One of the hottest trends they see is a "rapidly growing desire of more people to be self-empowered, non-reliant, and 'off the grid,'" in the broadest possible sense, as in "off the grid" of mainstream society. Such as, for example, ecovillages, sustainable intentional communities, and organized neighborhoods.

"It's time to return to the community," says Pat Murphy, executive director of The Community Solution, "to clean up the mess and get back on the right path." Murphy ended his organization's second annual conference on "Peak Oil and the Community Solution" by

noting that the survivors of this crisis will be those who seek out a "low-energy, caring, community way of living."

Humanity faces its biggest challenge since at least World Wars I and II, or perhaps even since the great plagues of the Middle Ages, or perhaps ever. No matter how prepared an intentional community or organized neighborhood may be, it will be adversely impacted in some way.

## Is Intentional Community Enough?

Experts suggest numerous scenarios for the coming energy decline. These range from a "magical elixir" scenario—a totally unexpected technological fix, to a "power-

down soft landing" scenario of everyone cooperating to reduce energy use by perhaps 90 percent or more, to a "Mad Max" scenario of anarchy and insurrection. Some even whisper the possibility of human extinction, since by most measures, we have overshot our resource base, a situation that ecologists believe is often a cause of extinction. But the point is, any of these scenarios will present significant challenges for intentional communities.

In the "soft landing" scenario, there will still be massive structural changes in society, with winners and losers. In this and other scenarios, being in debt may be the undoing of many. Let's say a community is deeply in debt, for example, and is still paying off its property purchase or one or more construction loans.

Let's say the community loses its financial resource base—if many members lose their jobs, for example, or if a weak economy reduces the market for the goods and services the community produces—the group could default on its loan payments and may have its property seized by the bank or other creditors. Common advice among Peak Oil experts is to get out of debt! (Although a vocal minority say you should take on as much fixed-

interest debt as possible, in the hope that escalating energy prices will inflate the debt away.)

A property-value crash may worsen the debt situation for intentional communities. During the last oil crisis, the market value of prime farmland fell by 30 percent or more. If a community's property value falls below their equity in the property, they won't be able to save themselves from defaulting on loans by selling off their land, which is typically the last resort of farmers in debt. (Again, a vocal minority claims that as energy prices escalate, fertile farmland will also increase in value.)

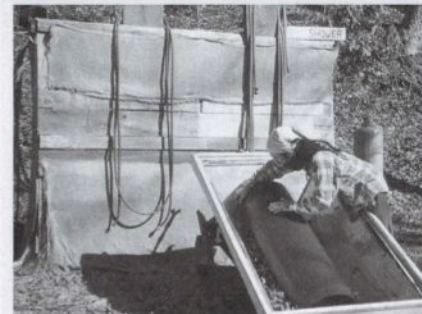
All the shortages and systems failures that can affect mainstream culture can

**Societal upheavals will favor those who have prepared over those who come to realization late, who haven't built community and sustainability skills.**

## Hot Water



JIM BOSJOLIE



The solar hot water-heating panels (above; on the left) on the roof of this wood-paneled strawbale home at EcoVillage at Ithaca require back-up heat only on cloudy days or at night. Outdoor showers at Earthaven (below) are heated by a batch solar hot water heater.

## Human Waste



Most sewage systems require electric power to pump water into houses and raw sewage through sewers. Alternatives can include simple five-gallon buckets with a scoop of sawdust (above), to be composted aerobically at high temperatures as "humanure compost," or outhouses (below), this one with a Swedish urine-separating device and separate buckets for collecting urine and solid waste. Humanure composting is not legal in many countries, though it is in others.

## Graywater



TAMAR FRIEDNER



Graywater from sink and shower drains can run through a constructed wetlands (above), like this one at Dancing Rabbit, which uses gravel beds and certain aquatic plants to purify the water. This graywater system outside a home at Earthaven (below) runs water from the sink drain through a concrete box of woodchips into the vegetable garden below. The microorganisms on the woodchips feed on the effluent in the water.

## Keeping Stored Food



Root cellars, like this one at Earthaven (above), can store food through the winter. Insulated icebox coolers stored outside on the north side of the house is how some Earthaven members keep food cold (below). The ice is made in a DC freezer powered by the community's stream-side micro-hydro unit.

affect intentional communities and organized neighborhoods as well. Clearly just “living in community” will not confer any kind of immunity from this gradual but drastic change. A community in a mountain forest setting may have plenty of water and firewood, for example, but little flat, arable land for growing food. A community on the prairie may have plenty of fertile, arable land, but little firewood. A community in the Great Plains may have plenty of sunshine for passive solar heating and off-grid power from solar-panels, but not enough firewood or water for growing food. A rural community may have enough space to grow food but little help from local emergency food-distribution networks. An urban community or organized neighborhood may have little space to grow vegetables, but proximity to emergency food distribution networks and local government assistance. But any community may not have enough foresight, labor, tools, or funds to create alternatives to whatever their members use now for heating, lighting, cooking, refrigeration, water collection, water pumping, and disposing of graywater and human waste.

Then there's the matter of community security—a subject many find “politically incorrect” even to consider. Many communities that embrace nonviolence may find it difficult to nonviolently defend their community in the face of anarchy or insurrection in the society around them. If the local government fails or if a local law and order system falls apart, there can be various kinds of dangerous consequences. Desperate, hungry people can loot and steal and take what they want from others. Vigilante groups can form to either deal with the lawlessness, or take what they want themselves. State or national government can declare martial law, rescind constitutional liberties, send in troops, and restore order or take what they want from others. Having supportive neighbors and good networking in the greater community may help. But in the worst-case, “Mad Max” scenario, it may not help much.

Embracing weaponry for self-defense may not be useful, either, as the presence of weapons and ammunition may simply make one a more attractive target to people

who want to get their hands on the community's weapons.

Another much more basic and subtle challenge to preparing for the coming energy decline is even being able to, as Richard Heinberg advises, “start an ecovillage” in the first place! It's really hard to start a new community in today's political, cultural, and financial environment. Land prices are exorbitant and getting more so every day. Zoning restrictions, designed to protect homeowners' property values, can severely limit a group's ability to create the community they want with the numbers of people they need. Building codes, designed to protect a county from lawsuits for approving unsafe buildings, and county and state health codes, designed to keep people safe from biological and other health hazards, can stop a community's sustainability plans faster than you can say, “That's illegal!” And the all-too-human tendency to bring habitual reactive and destructive behaviors to community settings—making it hard to get along well and resolve inevitable conflicts—can make cooperating with friends or neighbors, especially in frightening and desperate times, even more challenging than it normally is.

It is also difficult to radically change one's energy-consuming lifestyle. It may be easy to think, “I'd like to join an ecovillage some day” or “I'll stop depending so much on fossil fuels and live a more sustainable lifestyle soon,” yet it's easy to become inexorably distracted from that goal by the demands of jobs, family, and other responsibilities. Tearing oneself away from the status quo may be the most difficult thing we can ever do. Once we make the break, resisting the allure of today's cheap-energy lifestyle can be a constant effort.

Yet we must. The experts agree: the future will have more in common with the 18th century than it does with the 20th. Societal upheavals will favor those who have prepared over those who come to realization late, who haven't built community and sustainability skills.

In just a century and a half, humanity has spent down about half of its “bank account” of formerly cheap energy that has taken millions of years to accumulate. This may be our species' greatest crisis



ever, and there will be very few winners, and possibly billions of losers over the rest of our lives and longer. The winners will be either those with the power to hoard much of the remaining fossil energy, or those with the foresight, knowledge, resources, and will to live within the Earth's sustainable energy budget.

We certainly have no answers, solutions, or "magic bullets" for this dilemma. We both believe it's better to live cooperatively and sustainably with others, but we don't know what else is needed to truly be prepared for the inevitable energy decline. Is it better to be widely connected with one's neighbors and bioregion, or isolated and inaccessible? Is it better to grow all of one's own food and generate all of one's own energy, or to create a tight web of trade and barter relationships with one's friends and neighbors, supplying some of what they need and vice-versa? Our contributors to this issue offer various perspectives, and we hope you find them thought-provoking. We are sure of one thing though: people who understand what is happening,

and act with others of like mind to build sustainable agriculture, culture, and energy systems—in right relationship with the Earth's finite energy resources—will have at least a chance to live fulfilling lives in these challenging times.

*Jan Steinman has been a ski instructor, electrical design engineer, software engineer, and fine-art photographer, among many other pursuits. He drives with biofuels, strives to be an alternative lifestyle pioneer, and is a founding member of EcoReality: [www.EcoReality.org](http://www.EcoReality.org).*

*Diana Leafé Christian is editor of Communities magazine and author of Creating A Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities, and was a speaker at Community Service, Inc.'s "Peak Oil and Community Solutions" conference in 2005. She lives at Earthaven Ecovillage in North Carolina.*

## Resources for Learning More About Peak Oil

*The End of Suburbia.* This 78-minute video (on VHS or DVD) describes, with humor and fact, the energy crisis and how it happened, with testimony by leading petroleum engineers and Peak Oil researchers, including Richard Heinberg, James Howard Kunstler, and others. [www.EndOfSuburbia.com](http://www.EndOfSuburbia.com).

*The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil,* Megan Quinn and The Community Solution organization. Hopeful, inspiring 60-minute documentary of Cuba's crisis and recovery when they lost 50 percent of their oil overnight 12 years ago when the Soviet Union withdrew. Their responses range from permaculture design and solar energy, to city gardening on rooftops and balconies, and organic farming with oxen. [www.smallcommunity.org](http://www.smallcommunity.org).

*The Party's Over* and *Powerdown*, Richard Heinberg. Two of the most popular books that present this information in a readable way to lay people. New Society Publishers, 2003 and 2004, respectively.

*High Noon for Natural Gas*, Julian Darley. A hard-hitting look at an energy source that rapidly went from nuisance to crutch, and the implications of our increased dependence on a resource that will soon be in rapid decline. Chelsea Green Publishing, 2004.

*Relocalize Now!: Getting Ready for Climate Change and the End of Cheap Oil*, Julian Darley. Timely advice for re-creating local communities that can begin to build "parallel public infrastructures" for survival during the coming energy decline. New Society Publishers, 2006.

*The Long Emergency*, James Howard Kunstler. Kunstler's view of what life in the near future will be like, post Peak Oil. Grove Press, 2005.

*The Oil Age is Over: What to Expect as the World Runs Out of Cheap Oil: 2005-2050*, Matt Savinar. With a question and answer format, one of the easiest resources to understand what's happening and why; also one of the least optimistic (some would say "most realistic") perspectives of what's going to happen. Available mail order or paid download from the author's website: [www.LifeAfterTheOilCrash.net](http://www.LifeAfterTheOilCrash.net).

- [www.CommunitySolution.org](http://www.CommunitySolution.org). Website of Community Service, Inc., sponsors of the annual conference "Peak Oil And Community Solutions." "Dedicated to the development, growth, and enhancement of small local communities ... that are sustainable, diverse, and culturally sophisticated." Next conference: Sept. 22-24, 2006.

- [www.EnergyBulletin.net](http://www.EnergyBulletin.net). "A clearinghouse for current information regarding the peak in global energy supply."

- [www.PostCarbon.org](http://www.PostCarbon.org). Julian Darley's website. "Our mission is to assist societies in their efforts to re-localize communities and adapt to an energy-constrained world."

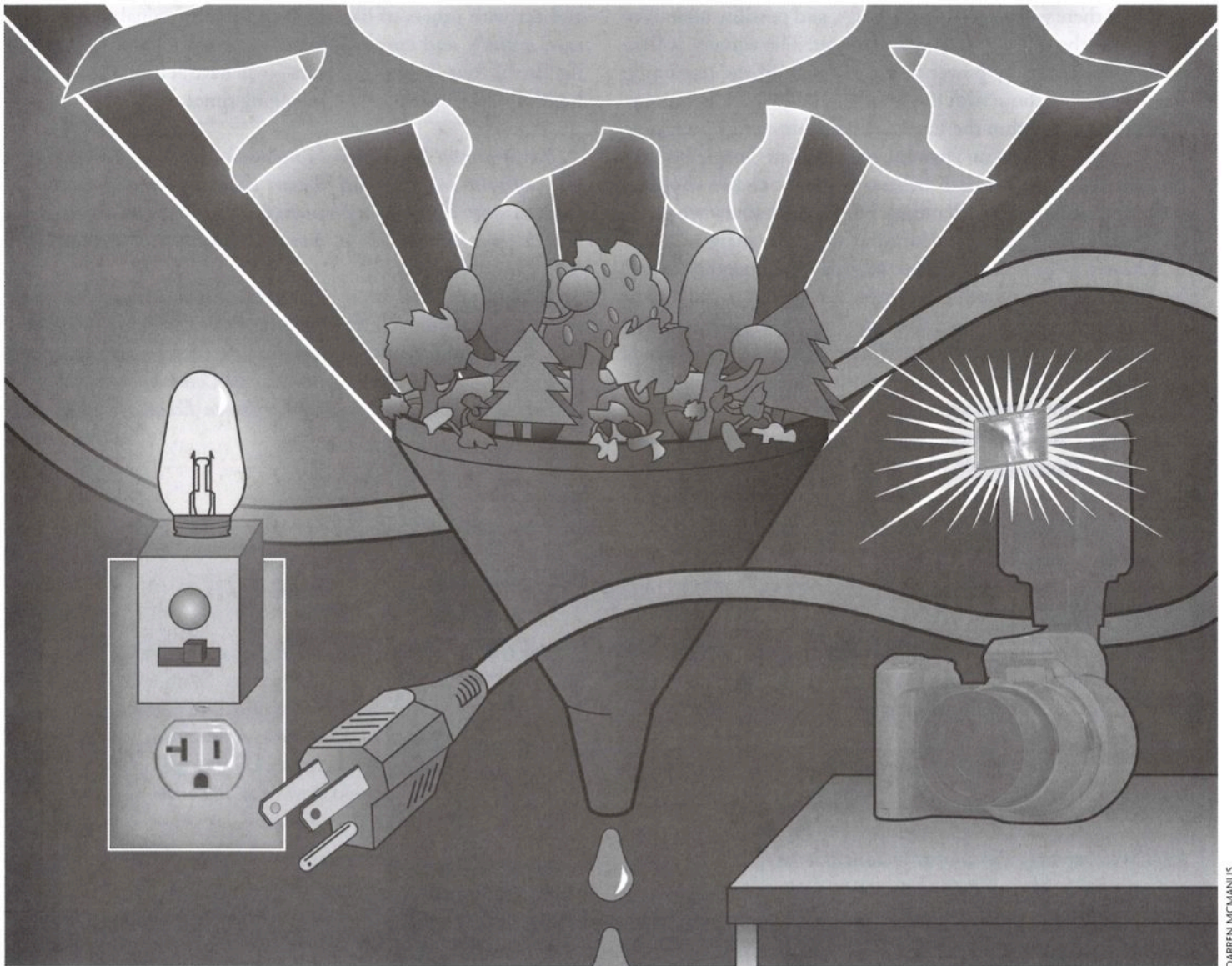
- [www.MuseLetter.com](http://www.MuseLetter.com). Richard Heinberg's website. "A monthly exploration of cultural renewal."

- [www.Dieoff.com](http://www.Dieoff.com). A massive collection of articles, assembled by Jay Hanson, regarding the relationship between resource depletion and population, including full text of many seminal scientific papers and published works.

- [www.TheLeadershipSchool.com](http://www.TheLeadershipSchool.com). "Committed to training the next generation in the sustainable skills of the 21st century."

- [www.TrendsResearch.com](http://www.TrendsResearch.com). "Discover the future, see tomorrow's trends today."

—J. S. & D.L.C.



DARREN MCMANUS

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BY JAN STEINMAN

# ENERGY

PRIMER:

How We Consume Our Ancient Sunlight

Think about someone in your community whom you would describe as “energetic.” You might say they are *forceful* (in the nicest possible manner)—or that they can bring *pressure* to bear on situations (again, in the nicest possible manner) which allows them to accomplish *work*, and that they are *empowered* to keep things *flowing* over long periods of *time*.

If so, you’ve unwittingly made a link between personal energy and the physics of energy. The essential characteristics of an energetic person are similar to those of a physical energy source, such as a gallon of biodiesel, sunlight on a solar panel, or the water coursing through a micro-hydro turbine.

***If we could convert energy between sunlight and mechanical motion, without any losses, all our energy problems could be solved.***

Physical energy can be defined as *the application of power to perform work over a period of time*.

But what is “power?” It can be defined as a *force* that causes a *flow*. For example, when you push against a latched door, you are applying a *force* to that door, but until the door is unlatched and actually moves, no *flow* results, so no power is actually transmitted to the door until it moves, when mechanical *work* is performed. (Likewise, a *powerful* person applies *force* of will, influence, or money, to entice ideas, labor, or goods and services to *flow*.)

It takes a finite amount of time to open the door—no matter how fast you move it, it doesn’t happen instantaneously. This *time* component is the third dimension of energy.

Think of a cardboard box. It has height, depth, and width. These might correspond to *force*, *flow*, and *time*, respectively. Together, the volume of the box (in liters, gallons, cubic inches, whatever) would represent a quantity of energy.

You could imagine a short, narrow, long box—like a box of fireplace matches. If such a box were lying on its side, it might represent an energy use that had relatively little *force* or *flow*, but one that continued for a long *time*, such as a night-light.

Stand that same box of fireplace matches on its small end, and you’ve got an energy use that has a tremendous *force*, but only a small amount of *flow* for a very brief *time*. This might represent, for example, an electronic flash for a camera. Yet, both “boxes” contain the same amount of energy!

In both these lighting examples, the specific *force* was voltage (also called “electromotive force”), and the *flow* was amperage, which is a count of the number of electrons that flow over time, and when multiplied together, they consume *power* in watts, which when used over a period of time, consume *energy* in the form of watt-hours.

(The firing of a small camera flash will consume about the same energy as a neon

or electroluminescent night-light glowing for perhaps a month, but an incandescent night-light that uses a Christmas tree light bulb uses the same amount of energy in well under a minute!)

Energy exists in many forms, but always has the three components of *force*, *flow*, and *time*. Energy can be converted between various forms, but can never be created or destroyed—this is the *First Law of Thermodynamics*, pioneered by Sir Isaac Newton in the late 18th century.

That’s the theory—wouldn’t that be nice in practice! If we could convert energy between sunlight and mechanical motion, without any losses, all our energy problems could be solved. But in reality, the *Second Law of Thermodynamics* states that when making energy conversions, a certain amount is always non-recoverable—it isn’t destroyed, but it is converted to an unusable form or unusable quantity of energy. This is called *entropy*, and I think it has a clear parallel in community social situations, as well! (Think of the old game of “telephone” and the energy spent in repeating misinterpreted communications.)

So although we talk about energy “production” and “consumption,” we are really simply converting energy to and from various forms, losing energy through *entropy*

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in the process. When making such conversions, the ratio of the energy you start with to the energy you end up with is called the *efficiency* of the energy conversion process.

For example, let's get away from lighting and drive a car. (If you don't drive a car, imagine driving a semi-truck that is delivering goods to you instead.) In fact, let's start millions of years ago: the sun shone onto the surface of the Earth for millions of years, at a strength of about 1,000 watts per square yard. Plants converted this solar energy into chemical energy through photosynthesis, but at an efficiency of only a few percent. So now we're down to a few tens of watts per square meter that is actually harvested by the plants.

But think of our night-light example. You can collect tremendous amounts of *energy* over long periods of *time*, even if the *power* is relatively low at any given instant. These

few tens of watts were collected into chemical energy by millions of generations of plant life, and that chemical energy was preserved after the plants died and became transformed by heat and pressure into coal, petroleum, and natural gas.

Now, let's pump out some of those long-dead plants, and refine them a bit to

**A 200 horsepower gasoline engine consumes about 60 million watts of ancient sunlight.**

take out the most useful bits for automotive transportation. This process also has *entropy*, measured by extraction *efficiency*, (also called "Energy Returned over Energy Invested", or "EROEI") and today we use about one unit of

energy to recover five units of petroleum energy. So before these long-dead plants even make it to our gas tank, we've lost about 20 percent of them.

Next, the petroleum's chemical energy is transformed via spark (gasoline) or heat and pressure (diesel) into thermal energy. This is actually quite an efficient process,

## Some Energy Forms and Units

Form	Force	Flow	Power	Energy
Electricity	Volts	Amps	Watt	Watt-hours
Engines	Foot-pounds of torque	RPM	Horsepower	Gallons of gas
Water power	Feet of head	Cubic feet per minute	Watts	Watt-hours
Wind	Miles per hour wind speed	Swept area of blades	Watts	Watt-hours

*To Learn More:*

- **WikiPedia**, an online, open-source encyclopedia, written and maintained by its users: <http://WikiPedia.org>. Search for the terms described above, such as *energy*, *power*, *work*, *force*, and *flow*.
- **How Stuff Works**, a great resource for understanding the basics of many things: [HowStuffWorks.com](http://HowStuffWorks.com). Particularly useful is [www.Science.HowStuffWorks.com/fpte.htm](http://www.Science.HowStuffWorks.com/fpte.htm), a simple physics tutorial.
- The **Danish Wind Industry Association** has a nice explanation of energy (in English) at [www.WindPower.org/en/stat/unitsene.htm](http://www.WindPower.org/en/stat/unitsene.htm).

—J.S.

and nearly all the chemical energy is transformed into thermal energy. But this is where things start to break down!

For most gasoline engines, only about 25 percent of the heat energy is transformed into mechanical energy to make the car move. (Diesel engines can transform about 40 percent.) So now, we're down to under 1

**We are using the  
gift of ancient  
sunlight in a flash,  
in geological terms.**

percent of the energy that the sun initially put into those long-dead plants. And then the transmission and tires eat up another 10 percent (manual) to 20 percent (automatic). This is why your radiator gets hot and your tires get warm—it's "waste" energy that could not be utilized to move the vehicle.

Now consider the tremendous rate at which we are using this ancient sunlight. A 200 horsepower gasoline engine—not unusual in an SUV or larger car—consumes about 60 million watts of ancient sunlight when it is running. This is the sunlight falling on an area of about 150 square miles! We are using energy at the rate of a flash bulb that accumulated at the rate of a night-light. We have this long, thin box of energy—the gift of ancient sunlight—that we are literally using in a flash, in geological terms.

Perhaps my clumsy attempt to tie physical energy with social energy made a bit of sense to you, or not. But I find it a useful analogy when dealing with fellow communitarians. Is he a slow-burning night-light? Is she a flash bulb? Energy conservation and wise use can be applied to organizations, as well!

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*Jan Steinman has been a ski instructor, electrical design engineer, software engineer, and fine-art photographer, among many other pursuits. He drives with biofuels, strives to be an alternative lifestyle pioneer, and is a founding member of Eco-Reality: [www.EcoReality.org](http://www.EcoReality.org). Jan is co-author of this issue's editorial, "Community Survival During the Coming Energy Decline," pg. 24.*

# CAMP



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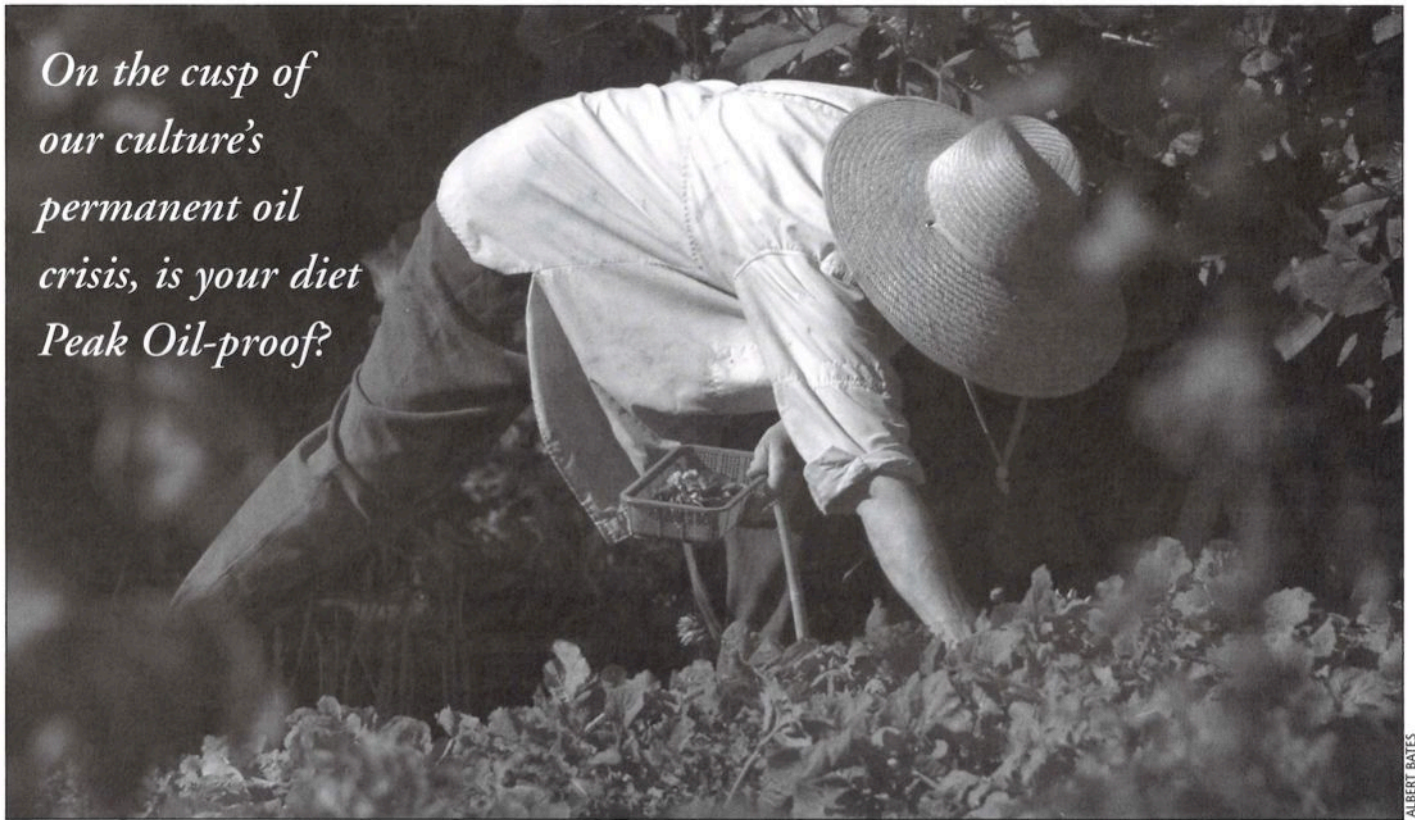
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# Peak Oil & Community Food Security

BY ETHAN GENAUER

How organized neighborhoods and small towns are ensuring their future food supply

*On the cusp of our culture's permanent oil crisis, is your diet Peak Oil-proof?*



*Gardening at Linnea Farm, British Columbia*

As evidence accumulates foretelling the imminent shock of what some are calling “petrocollapse,” one central concern of communities—including organized neighborhoods and intentional communities—should be the safety and continuity of our food supply. All but the most self-sustaining communities should start planning now to minimize the impact of diminishing oil supplies on food security, because, to an astonishing extent, the system of industrial agribusiness that produces the vast majority of available food is addicted to constant streams of cheap fossil fuels.

## Community Food Security

“We’re only truly secure when we can look out our kitchen window and see our food growing and our friends working nearby,” says Bill Mollison, a founder of the eco-gardening revolution called permaculture. In recent decades, as community leaders and activists have come to realize the inequality, dependence on non-renewable resources, and toxicity to the environment inherent in industrial agribusiness, many have reached the same conclusion, and a burgeoning movement for community food

security has emerged. The Community Food Security Coalition, a North American organization with over 325 member groups, defines community food security as “a condition in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.” While some nightmarish post-Peak Oil scenarios foresee dog-eat-dog competition over scarce food resources where only the strongest survive, community food security envisions local cooperation, self-empowerment, and advance planning as the ideal ways to ensure healthy, consistent nourishment for everyone.

The leap from reliance on industrial food growing, processing, and delivery to engagement with community food security will inevitably demand tremendous lifestyle changes from many people accustomed to drive-thru fast food and salad greens trucked thousands of miles to their nearest Wal-Mart (now the top US food retailer). But, fortunately, those who choose to attempt the leap will not have far to jump and can anticipate a relatively soft landing in the Earth’s fertile soil (with help, to be sure, from liberal applications of homemade compost). In most

bioregions and population centers, numerous groups are already putting the goals of community food security into practice. As awareness of Peak Oil proliferates, many are preparing preemptively for their post-oil future. Their efforts can be both models to replicate and endeavors to join. They include farmers' markets, community supported agriculture, permaculture groups, food justice movements, and relocalization initiatives. In an oil-deprived future, ventures such as these will be the keys to community health and survival.

### Farmers' Markets

One of the simplest ways for communities to liberate their food supply from oil dependence is to create and support local farmers' markets. By minimizing transport distances of produce and eliminating intermediaries between grower and consumer, farmers' markets drastically reduce levels of fossil fuel use. Through the face-to-face communication they enable, farmers' markets not only foster community interaction but also allow buyers to learn what energy-

***"We're only truly secure when we can look out our kitchen window and see our food growing and our friends working nearby," says Bill Mollison.***

efficient methods of crop cultivation various farmers employ—and to direct their support to those using the best practices.

Purchasing food at farmers' markets, whether in small amounts or in bulk, also keeps cash within the local economy, protects the livelihood of farmers and therefore preserves open spaces and combats sprawl, and gives communities a reliable source of fresh, nutritious, frequently organic and hand-picked food. Many farmers' markets sell more than just fruits and vegetables, and include meats, wines, cheeses, flowers, herbs, baked goods, clothing, and hand-crafted items. Most are located conveniently at the heart of populated areas and near public transportation.

The number of farmers' markets in the US has increased dramatically in recent decades, rising from 300 in the mid-1970s to 1,750 in 1993 and over 3,400 today. Yet they still represent less than 0.5 percent of total food sales. One reason for this is the irregular hours, days, and seasons they are open. Another may be that their produce tends to be higher-priced than that of the mass-produced, federally subsidized brands sold in stores.



ROD RYLANDER

## How Vulnerable Are We to Food Scarcity?

### *The Relationship Between Oil and Food*

- Americans buy 90 percent of their food in supermarkets.
- In the US, produce travels an average of 1,500 miles before it reaches supermarkets.
- Processed foods now account for three-fourths of all food sales globally.
- The 30 largest supermarket chains sell one-third of all food.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Demographers estimate that in 2006, for the first time, over half of humanity will be urbanized, living in towns or cities.
- The food security of most humans is tied to overextended energy grids because of globalization of food industries, the rapid boom of metropolises, and the expansion of supermarkets.
- 35 million Americans and 2 billion people worldwide suffer chronic hunger or malnutrition.
- After crops leave the farm, two times more energy is expended to transport, process, package, and sell food as was used to cultivate and harvest it.
- Without massive inputs from fast depleting reserves of oil and natural gas, most crops, especially grains, could not be grown at their present hyper-industrial scale.
- Fertilizer, pesticides, irrigation, and gas-guzzling farm machinery are the essential ingredients that drive modern factory farming—and the affordability, or availability, of these inputs depends entirely upon that of the fossil fuels used to manufacture and operate them.<sup>[2]</sup>

It's no surprise that for conventional farmers, typically among the first to feel the effects of shifting energy winds, an increasingly crippling energy crisis is no remote possibility but already an everyday reality. In the US, where dwindling production of natural gas (a phenomenon similar to Peak Oil but geologically unique)<sup>[3]</sup> has led to soaring fertilizer costs, industrial farmers are struggling to raise profitable crops despite the enormous aid they receive—\$22.7 billion out of \$71.5 billion of net farm income in 2005—through government subsidies.

Corn, the most fertilizer-hungry crop, highlights the problem: in late 2005, some farmers forecasted that their 2006 corn plantings could decrease by up to 25 percent as they switch to less fertilizer-intensive crops like wheat and soybeans. But when oil scarcity sends fuel prices skyrocketing, could not those crops too quickly become unprofitable, forcing many farmers to plant *no crops*? How fast might processed foods become a luxury or supermarket shelves grow empty? Will grain stocks be fed to livestock or converted into bio-fuels, to make meat and gas for wealthy consumers, while poorer people starve? And, more to the point, what can organized neighborhoods and intentional communities do in order to insulate their food supply from such unnerving, yet not unrealistic, future impacts of oil depletion? —E.G.

As the escalating price of fossil fuels pushes up the cost of conventional foods and makes small-scale, locally harvested produce more financially competitive, this discrepancy should gradually diminish and ultimately reverse.

Nevertheless, most farmers' markets do already enjoy great popularity and nurture an excellent atmosphere in which one can meet local food-savvy citizens, share knowledge about Peak Oil and other issues, and discuss new approaches to improve community food security. And bargains are not uncommon! To find farmers' markets and other community food security resources throughout the US, [www.localharvest.org](http://www.localharvest.org) provides a free directory. Local independent tabloids are also good sources of information.

### Community Supported Agriculture Farms

Another form of economic interdependency between farmers and community members that further intensifies their relationship of mutual support and commitment is community supported agriculture (CSA). As a non-capitalist kind of cooperative trade, community supported agriculture is a prototype of what some community organizers have defined as "solidarity economics."<sup>[4]</sup> Through community supported agriculture, members pay the farmer an annual fee to cover the farm's production costs. In exchange, they receive a weekly share of the harvest during the growing season. This arrangement guarantees the farmer financial support and enables many small- to moderate-scale organic family farms to remain in business.

In addition to sustaining the enterprise and reducing the personal risk of farmers by distributing the cost of any failed harvest throughout the community, community supported agriculture

creates "agriculture-supported communities" where members receive a wide variety of foods harvested at their height of ripeness, flavor, and vitamin and mineral content. Some CSA farms deliver bundles of food to the homes of members; others drop them off at a median location or require members to pick them up at the farm. Many aim to enhance community participation in the farm by hosting special seasonal events, letting members harvest or select their produce at the farm and encouraging them to volunteer time to assist farm work. Some also return community solidarity by donating surplus food to low-income families, food banks, or soup kitchens. An international directory of CSA farms is available at [www.csacenter.org](http://www.csacenter.org).

During the decades following Peak Oil, community supported agriculture could evolve to serve additional functions. Community members might save seeds from their yield to plant at home and form seed-sharing networks, organize food security skill trainings, develop collective systems to pool their compost and protect local water security, and unite to confront broader challenges that impact local food security, like climate change, invasion of non-native species, political upheaval, or over-exploitation of natural resources. The CSA model could even extend beyond food to other areas of local

economies. For example, the Post-Carbon Institute—a Peak Oil think tank—envisions Community Supported Manufacturing and Community Supported Energy, or "Local Energy Farms," that would provide modest amounts of reliable, renewable energy for local use. As well as satisfying wider community needs, these could contribute the tools and energy base that local agriculture requires.

**Community food security  
envisions local  
cooperation, self-  
empowerment, and  
advance planning to  
ensure healthy,  
consistent nourishment  
for everyone.**

### Permaculture Design

Farmers' markets and CSA both cut oil dependence by dramatically narrowing the divide between producers and consumers of food, yet they still uphold a degree of separation. Weaving food growing into the seams of community life—connecting everyone directly with its rhythms, in effect—can further deepen food security. Permaculture, a contraction of "permanent agriculture," is a holistic philosophy of ecological design and a set of ethics that seeks to integrate sustainable food production systems into human habitat. Founded in the late 1970s in part as a creative reaction to the energy constraints and oil crisis of that era, permaculture strives for harmonious interplay of human dwellings, microclimate, fruit- and nut-bearing trees, annual and perennial plants, animals, soils, and water in stable, productive communities.

By mimicking patterns found in nature, permaculture aims to heighten the efficiency of human labor, eliminate waste, maximize biodiversity, and use biological processes as energy sources instead of fossil fuels. As a design philosophy,



ALEXANDRA CARDERO





ALEXANDRA CARDERO

it is versatile enough to be applied to any ecosystem or built environment, and has been crystallized for all to read in the written wisdom of practitioners worldwide, like Australian permaculture co-founder Bill Mollison's voluminous "design manuals." Permaculture can offer particularly dynamic solutions to Peak Oil by responding to it, not as a terrifying threat, but enthusiastically as a perfect and unprecedented *opportunity* to transform ecologically barren, car-centered concrete jungles and suburban wastelands dependent on food imports into truly livable communities replete with restored green spaces featuring neighborhood gardens, food forests, and other "edible landscapes."

"We have trouble visualizing decline as positive, but this simply reflects the dominance of our prior culture of growth," writes fellow permaculture co-founder David Holmgren in his new book, *Permaculture: Principles and Pathways Beyond Sustainability*. With brilliantly pragmatic insight, he analyzes how communities can embrace "energy descent" through permaculture with "whole-hearted adaptation to the ecological realities of decline which are as natural and creative as those of growth." From an evolutionary outlook, he argues, the steep ride down energy descent can precipitate spiritual and cultural ascent: "When an adolescent sense of immortality and values of speed, novelty, and endless growth define a whole civilisation, we are close to its demise and the birth of a new cultural paradigm."<sup>15</sup>

One wave of this new paradigm is emerging through Permaculture Guilds, or professional associations of permaculture enthusiasts, in dozens of US cities. Some of these Guilds are restricted to individuals who have earned a Permaculture Design Certificate by completing a standard 72-hour training program; others also welcome amateur participants. All are engaged in var-

ious forms of permaculture education and activism. In Oregon, Portland's Guild hosts free monthly educational meetings, creates public permaculture demonstration sites, and forms partnerships with other organizations like City Repair (*see "City Repair and the Opportunity of Peak Oil," p. 42*) to promote local sustainability. Eugene is also home to an active Guild, as well as the Permatopia group, which meets to discuss implications of Peak Oil. In Oakland, the Urban Permaculture Guild has started a scholarship fund to enable low-income activists to receive subsidized permaculture training. And in the greater Baltimore area, another Guild offers internships and workshops, provides a free online introductory

course, and sponsors four demonstration sites, including one at Heathcote, an intentional community and land trust in rural southeastern Pennsylvania.

To the extent that such Guilds have become possible only through the achievement of a critical mass of permaculture-educated individuals in each location where one exists, they represent the diffusion and maturity of permaculture as a movement. After Peak Oil, their importance will increase as repositories of living knowledge about fossil fuel-free food security. However, in order to reach permaculture's fullest potential, more Guilds must shed their elitism

as clubs mostly open only to those who can afford to attend Certificate-granting permaculture design courses, and develop new ways to reach, teach, and help empower cash-poor individuals and communities, who are most afflicted by food insecurity.

### Food Justice

In some cities, permaculture groups are building local food security by doing just that. In Los Angeles, TreePeople distributes plum, peach, apricot, fig, and nectarine trees to community groups, schools, and churches in underserved low-income neigh-

## **Weaving food-growing into the seams of community life— connecting everyone directly with its rhythms—can further deepen food security.**

borhoods, and teaches horticultural skills to community residents. Austin's consensus-run nonprofit Rhizome Collective has transformed a fire-damaged industrial-zone warehouse into a thriving center of community organizing with lush gardens and aquaculture wetlands that include edible water plants. Rhizome Collective is starting a neighborhood composting operation and won an EPA grant to restore a ten-acre brownfield into an environmental education park, through fungi-based bioremediation. They also provide kitchen space to Austin's local Food Not Bombs chapter, one of hundreds worldwide, that salvages edible vegetarian food "waste" (from markets, restaurants and dumpsters) to cook and share with homeless people and other community folks. In Houston, Urban Harvest grants free classes and low-cost seeds to community gardeners, hosts a model fruit and vegetable garden for hands-on training, runs a twice-weekly Farmers' Market, assists schools with the design and construction of new gardens while educating stu-

dents to tend them, *and* sponsors a local Permaculture Guild. Such projects expose as false the myth that urban communities cannot take charge of their own food security.

By doing so, urban communities also act as partners or leaders in new movements for food justice, which sprouted in the 1990s

to reshape notions of food security by confronting dynamics of racism and economic marginalization that frequently exacerbate urban food insecurity, malnutrition, and hunger. Inside America's poorest neighborhoods of color, fast food joints and corner stores specializing in junk food and liquor tend to be the only "food" options. Redlining—the practice of refusing to serve certain geographical areas due to the race or income of the area's residents—leaves entire communities without supermarkets and high-quality restaurants. Zoning

laws, lack of community control over property and land, polluted soil, and poor water supply restrict urban agriculture. When neighborhoods successfully unite to establish gardens in abandoned lots, redevelopment often bulldozes them. As a result of these forces blocking access to healthful eating, poor and working-class people of color suffer disproportionately from heart disease, hypertension, obesity, diabetes and some types of cancer. Poor rural communities and the migrant workers who labor on industrial farms face many similar obstacles.

"The cheap-food machine we've created," explains organic farmer and environmental journalist Tom Philpott, "fueled by our cheap-oil policy and underwritten by billions each year in commodity-agriculture subsidies, means that poor people can get almost limitless calories. Nourishment, however, is not part of the game."<sup>[6]</sup> Food justice movements give new meaning to the phrase "food fight" by aiming to challenge and rectify the root causes of such illness-inducing inequity.<sup>[7]</sup>

***"Relocalization" is the revitalization of local water, food, and energy security through grassroots community-based movements.***

## Essential Questions about Food Security

In their "Food Security Report for Willits," before plunging into detailed calculations of local food needs and prospects, Willits Economic Localization (WELL) presents some of the complex, multi-faceted questions that every community must ask itself:

- What varieties of crops are best suited to this area, where are the seeds, and how can seeds be selected and stored?
- How can abundance in one season be used in another by drying, canning, and storing?
- Who will make and repair tools, water pumps, fencing, hoses?
- What is the most effective and least environmentally damaging means of food production within a diverse landscape?
- How can local markets be created so farmers have a means of exchange that supports the productivity of the farm?
- What renewable energy sources are needed to ensure the continued operation of farms?
- How can we produce a diversity of food for adequate nutrition, diet preferences, and farm ecosystem health?

—E.G.



ALBERT BATES

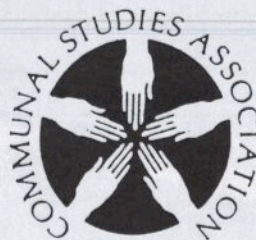
New York City activists have mobilized a particularly lively food justice movement. In the South Bronx, the More Gardens! Coalition fights to preserve and expand community gardens in the shadow of high-rise public housing complexes. In Manhattan's Lower East Side, Green Guerillas has helped thousands of people realize their dreams of turning vacant rubble-strewn lots into vibrant community gardens and advocated for their protection from developers. Meanwhile, b-healthy! educates low-income New York City youth and workers about healthy cooking, nutrition, and affordable alternatives to low-quality school lunches, commercially processed junk food, and fattening fast food. Their CHOP (Cre-

***The oil crash can help drive a rediscovery of local self-sufficiency and community solidarity.***

ating Healthy Organic Power) Project is an intensive training program that teaches youth basic cooking techniques and organizing strategies to connect their personal health with the social and economic well-being of their communities. And since 1995, Just Food—one of the movement's founding organizations—has worked to link economic, social, and environmental justice by strengthening local food systems, with a focus on community-supported agriculture and farmers' markets. Their City Farms Project has been the catalyst of 33 CSA farms, in all five boroughs, and four farmers' markets. In 2004, some of these farms produced over 30,000 pounds of food.<sup>[8]</sup>

Yet as oil depletion approaches, New York City and many other cities face an uphill battle for food security. Two million people in New York City today are at risk of going hungry. As many as one in five—and a quarter of the city's children, which is double the national rate—need help from food pantries and kitchens.<sup>[9]</sup>

*(continued on p. 62)*



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Prototype Craftsman-style straw-clay dwelling for Dignity Village (above). This community art project in Portland's Sunnyside neighborhood transformed an ordinary intersection into "Sunnyside Piazza," a regular visiting place for many Portlanders (facing page; above). Another neighborhood art project transformed this Portland intersection into a labyrinth (facing page; below).

CITY REPAIR

# City Repair & the Opportunity of Peak Oil

BY LYDIA DOLEMAN AND MARK LAKEMAN

Peak Oil is a problem of power. The power of those who appear to have it and make really awful decisions based on skewed priorities. The power of communities—urban neighborhoods and small towns—that intrinsically have power but have come to accept powerlessness. Be it Peak Oil, global warming, the population explosion, or our present crisis of leadership, the great issues of our time merely reflect the essential problem of who is making the major decisions in our society, and where, why, and how they make them. Peak Oil, like other challenges, is also linked to its own solution. As with most problems, this may simply reflect the fact that other opportunities were not allowed to flourish. In the case of Peak Oil, we mean that communities can instead make better decisions on their own behalf.

***The cause and great danger of Peak Oil is our fragile social architecture.***

Again, the essential challenge of Peak Oil is not that we must find new fuel resources to feed a voracious industrial appetite. Nor is it even the incalculable social instability that will result when ever-larger numbers of oil-dependent people are not able to meet their basic needs. An industrial infrastructure dependent on limited sources of fuel, a transportation system that locates living places far away from working places, the "dis-integration" of the social dimensions of our lives through zoning laws—these were not choices that any community made for itself.

The cause and great danger of Peak Oil is our fragile social architecture. Irrespective of where power lies, we all seem to have forgotten how much richer and more beautiful life would be if our communities were truly healthy and strong. Whether or not we are prepared for the problem of Peak

Oil, we are probably all intrinsically prepared for the solution—strong, interconnected, and interdependent communities.

While there may be some rural ecovillages that are resilient, diversified, and autonomous enough to cope, as things are now urban communities will not survive when food is not available because transport systems have failed. As for the various scenarios such as “Power Down,” “Soft Landing,” or “Mad Max,” so much will depend upon our ill-equipped political leadership. And unfortunately, our countries’ leaders, legislatures, and police are far more likely to contain, control, or even liquidate our communities rather than develop a more sustainable and adaptable infrastructure—just remember New Orleans. It seems that Peak Oil presents us with yet another crisis-beyond-comprehension, yet there is a way forward through this and any other challenge that threatens all communities of Earth. Though it may seem an oversimplification, Peak Oil is merely one symptom among many of a great, single, common problem that can be understood and must be transformed.

### Repair the City to Repair the World

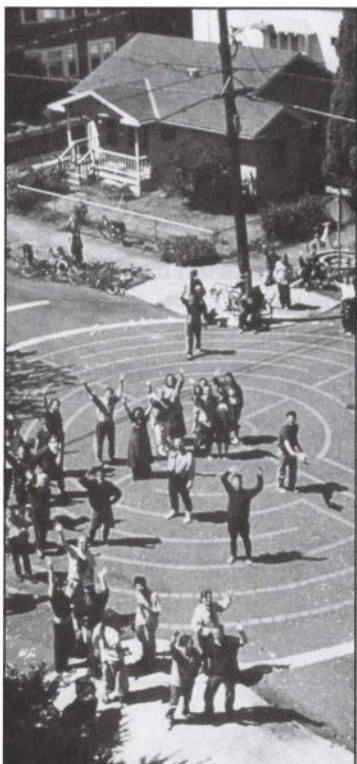
The City Repair Project was born in Portland, Oregon, in 1996. We began to orchestrate a tidal wave of creative solutions just after we had realized that the global network of cities is an interconnected political and economic network, and these cities are to a great extent dependent upon control systems and structures that must work similarly across the entire globe. We were inspired by the realization that we could accelerate global change through local action designed to effect systemic change. That sounds like a mouthful, but we mean that by creating true stories of real alternatives that appeal to many other frustrated people and places, all struggling with the same essential challenges, we are all able to offer effective strategies for changing the world. In this context, “City Repair” is actually a synonym for permaculture. As permaculture co-founder Bill Mollison refers to permaculture as “Planet Repair,” so City Repair is a way of recognizing our ability to effect permanent, sustainable, systemic change at the local level and in the urban context where so many problems are linked.

According to City Repair, the mother of all problems is that, individually and collectively, we are not directly creating our local realities in concert with the people around us, whom we engage our lives with and come to love, and who propel us along with inspiration and energy.



CITY REPAIR

***We creatively interrupt the city grid in order to transform streets into an active social commons.***



CITY REPAIR

With respect to Peak Oil, therefore, we feel that all short and long term solutions begin with joining our individual energies within communities of mutual support. We build from there. Our strategy towards attaining a sustainable future is much like the template many ecovillages are using, in the sense that we are bringing people together to build relationships as they also build alternative, localized systems that are ecological in nature and tend towards self-reliance. What makes us unique is that we encourage local, urban communities to interrupt the city grid in order to transform streets into an active social commons. This strategy has not only given us a high level of visibility across the United States, but it has inspired a greater extent of activity to take place in Portland and other cities than might otherwise have occurred.

Our perspective on Peak Oil is similar to other crisis-preparation scenarios. We prepare by creating self-sustaining life-systems with good people who care about us. Fortunately, this is the kind of work we should all be engaged in anyway, because it necessitates self-empowerment, skill building, stronger community identity, ownership, networks of new relationships, and even personal growth. We do this because the truth is that human communities tend to make creative, largely sustainable choices when local people are able to make decisions for themselves, based on their own direct experiences where they live. In City Repair, whether we are engendering new community organizations or building community gathering places, installing photovoltaic systems to light community kiosks, or setting up water catchment systems, we are doing very important work to prepare for every eventuality. The most important scenario to prepare for, though, is the one that brings us maximum fulfillment within a community. In City Repair, we see this as birthright work, a way to live with others in spite of any system or structure of oppression.

### The Village Building Convergence

City Repair has helped Portland create almost innumerable variations on community gathering places, both permanent and mobile. We have sent enormous, butterfly-shaped teahouses out into the city in order to bring people together and inspire an awareness everywhere that gathering places are simply absent across the American grid. As a result, communities throughout the city have become inspired to initiate and create many new organizations and community

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gathering places that reflect local cultures and priorities. The most significant way we do this is during an annual event called the Village Building Convergence (VBC). This year, the VBC will simultaneously activate more than 25 Portland neighborhoods to come outside, join their energies for ten days, and to live and build places as Villagers once again as they practice living in a sustainable, local culture.

Through the VBC, we redress the terrible impact on our communities of the national land ordinance of 1785, which blueprinted Roman colonial grid-planning over the North American continent. The grid has worked to retard the development of communities because it is a monolithic design that intentionally converts the natural world into a commodity and omits the gathering places that would otherwise

**Create self-sustaining  
life-systems with  
good people who  
care about you.**

exist at the crossing of pathways or intersections. The grid defeats the human pattern to intersect. Through it, we have inherited a devious Roman strategy—that while it may be our nature to connect and “love our neighbors,” the Roman grid is designed to isolate and control conquered villagers. Instead, the VBC brings people outside to change their world directly and regain the awareness and the power to intersect, act directly with their communities. A very good thing indeed, since some believe the term democracy is translated from the original Greek as “people joining in a place.” Through the enormous local impact of the VBC, City Repair is working to build the real bones of democracy. Practicing democracy as we build ecological places that reflect local economies and relationships is surely the social foundation for sustainable culture-building. So, the VBC is simply a reflection of the human capacity to love, resulting in culturally-reflective places where people’s lives are able to intersect.

During the ten days of the Village Building Convergence, people from all over the country come together to share knowledge, meals, housing, and to participate in the various community projects all over Portland. They'll take part in numerous workshops, with topics ranging from Village design to democracy, from making biofuels to permaculture design, communication and mediation, rocket stoves, sacred "arcology," and so much more. In the evenings there is a grand vegetarian meal just before hundreds of people gather in the main venue to attend presentations and musical events. Past presenters include Toby Hemenway, Penny Livingston, Starhawk, and a Who's Who list of natural builders from across the continent. One of the most popular evenings is Monday night's "Moonday Tea-House," relaxing, socializing, and drinking tea on mountains of pillows under the bamboo canopies of our three mobile tea-houses: the T-Whale, T-Horse, and T-Pony.

Of the many community-building tools employed during the Village Building Convergence, some of the most successful are fun and empowerment through natural building. Located strategically in public streetscapes, natural building projects work to build social cohesion and a sense of place while simultaneously demonstrating healthy living. Natural building isn't just construction; it is a comprehensive building philosophy that mirrors and illuminates the principles of permaculture. Building together as a community, while using our immediate resources in terms of creating shelter or structure, we are able to cultivate an awareness while we build relationship to the place we are in. In Portland, we see our beautiful trees, our rich clay soil, our river rock, and our broken-up sidewalks and other discarded materials as resources to be in relationship with. When we build with what is directly around us, we foster connections and responsibility while weaving more relevant stories into the fabric of our pathways. This creates a more intimate relationship with the place where we live.

In fact, by using natural building as a model, we are refuting the traditional notion of builder-as-expert and instead we are empowering people who formerly



People at this block party at Sherrit Square, now called "Share-It Square," are celebrating the repainting of the intersection mandala.

may have never felt that the world of building was open to them (grandmothers, children, and women especially). The labor-oriented nature of natural materials and techniques become a great asset, calling communities to work and shape the world together, and instilling a sense of pride in the place where they live.

### Dignity Village

One of City Repair's most significant efforts to empower a community through the natural building model is Dignity Village, built by and for previously homeless

people. After a legal battle that overturned Portland's notorious anti-camping ordinance, civil disobedience actions followed by months of public community organizing efforts led to a legally sanctioned, self-organized campsite village in begun in the year 2000 on an acre in north Portland. With a fluctuating population of 65 to 80 people, Dignity Village members quickly established a system for self-governance, tent shelters on pallets, a solar community gathering place and council dome, a library, toilets and showers, laundry facilities, and an office with phone and Internet service.



One of City Repair Project's mobile tea-houses, the T-Pony, set up in downtown Portland's Pioneer Square.

Formerly homeless people became democratically-elected officers of their organization, living in a much more stable atmosphere within the context of community. Women living at the village were infinitely safer than they had been on the streets. No drugs or violence were allowed. As they formed the village vision, there was more than just a desire to transcend homelessness; the villagers wanted to create a model, something everyone, homeless or not, could aspire to.

In April 2003, in partnership with the City Repair Project, the first strawbale dwelling prototype built in the city was constructed at Dignity Village: a handsome, solar-oriented Craftsman-style 14x18' home with a water-catchment system, earthen plasters, and nearly all recycled materials—for only \$500 in materials. This success became a well-publicized testament to ecological and affordable housing. In 2004, as part of the Village Building Con-

vergence, Dignity Village began to replace their tent structures with residential natural buildings. Five straw-clay, passive-solar houses were built in the ten-day period of the VBC, bringing together a boldly diverse crowd—from Christians and Republicans to homeless folks and anarchists, all working toward the same goals. Even the soon-to-be mayor joined working in the mud. Five homes were completed, for the amazing cost of \$250 apiece in materials. Dignity Village has since built more homes, and as more efficient ways of on-the-spot recycling are discovered, the price of materials per home has fallen even lower.

It can be said that Dignity Village is itself a living solution to the crisis that Peak Oil presents us. As a group of individuals the villagers have utterly simplified their needs, reduced their resource consumption, and through self-governance



Oiled cob angel bench at "Share-It Square," created during the 2005 week-long Village Building Convergence.

CITY REPAIR

**What brings most people joy? Beauty, feelings of love, connectedness.**

eliminated entire infrastructures of waste—be it political or industrial. What they are building is propelled by a vast accumulation of social capital, which expands all the dimensions of community, including the spiritual.

### What Brings Us Joy?

Building stronger local communities is directly relevant to global energy transition because sustainable patterns of working, living, and consuming can only be established by communities for themselves. Indeed, working with our neighbors has everything to do with "saving the world" because it is only in that context that community values are actually expressed, heard, and reflected in actions that connect us to our place. The culture that maintains an awareness of future generations will work to sustain itself, whereas we know that a group that only prioritizes a quarterly return on investments isn't even likely to make sus-

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Lysbeth Borie



tainable economic decisions. How we view our resources is a reflection of how we view ourselves and each other.

What brings most people joy? Beauty, feelings of love, connectedness. Regardless of the current geopolitical situation, all of these keys to joy are accessible and are part of the patterns that help weave the deepest solutions. The human spirit is beautiful and indomitable. People are inherently social and creative. Peak Oil is merely a symptom of a deeper, grander challenge, the remedy to which lies in a fabric of rewoven relationships. It is only through being broken that individuals perpetuate a system of imbalance and disconnection. The way to survive Peak Oil is the same as the solution to every major global challenge—through a series of opportunities to choose sustainability, to choose relatedness, to choose community. As we survive every local or global challenge, our destiny and our goals as a larger community will remain the same—to fulfill the potential of our experience living on the Earth, in community with each other.

*Mark Lakeman is a co-founder and co-director of the City Repair Project in Portland, Oregon. After a brief career in corporate architecture, he traveled the world from 1988-1995 to find archetypal human patterns that could be applied in urban contexts to effect a self-healing process. Mark feels that in the City Repair Project he has found his life work.*

*Lydia Doleman is a natural builder currently practicing in Portland, Oregon. Her company, Flying Hammer Productions, focuses on pushing the bounds of affordable and energy-efficient housing, training people and communities in various building skills, and infecting the dreary urban fabric with structures that reflect beauty, sustainability, and community.*

*The City Repair Project will host Portland's sixth annual Village Building Convergence May 19-28, featuring more than 25 simultaneous permaculture and natural-building projects all over the city, along with evening cultural events. Fee (lunches and dinners, all day and evening events, home-stay lodging) is \$270 for all ten days (\$350 after 5/11), or \$30 per day; some work-trade also available. [www.cityrepair.org](http://www.cityrepair.org); email for more information: [vbcvolunteer@cityrepair.org](mailto:vbcvolunteer@cityrepair.org); registration: [vbcregistration@cityrepair.org](mailto:vbcregistration@cityrepair.org).*

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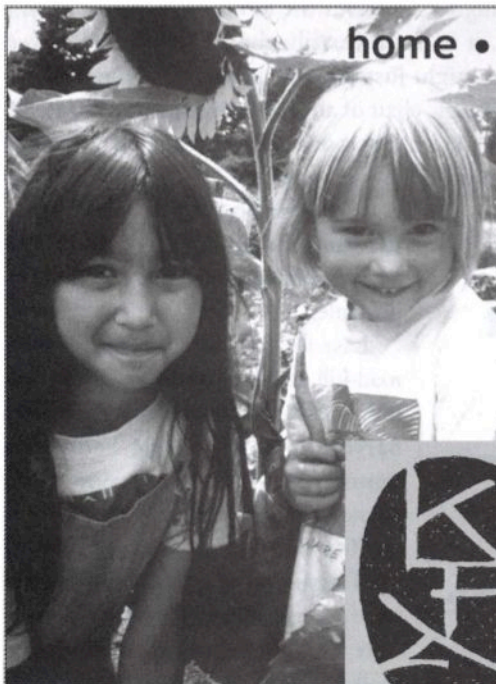


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# Peak Oil as “Opportunity”?

## Overestimating the Preparedness of the Ecovillage and Permaculture Movements

**W**ithin the permaculture and ecovillage communities, the dominant response to Peak Oil is one of jubilation. Finally, the juice that powers the juggernaut of monopoly capitalism, crushing all in its path, is drying up. The flowers of biodiversity, so the story goes, will once again bloom and small-scale community economies will thrive. Permaculture will move centre-stage as the philosophical foundation of the new decentralised societies and ecovillages will be the principal laboratories for social and technological innovation.

However, there are strong grounds for suggesting that we are misreading the situation and seriously overestimating the preparedness of the permaculture and ecovillage movements for the social revolution that lies before us. Just because corporations will not be able to survive the coming energy famine does not necessarily mean that we will see a smooth transition to the kind of societies we envision, or that we will be embraced as the harbingers of the new age. Human societies are set upon a considerably more hazardous and unpredictable path than the prophets of a cosy new ecovillage-driven sustainability would have us believe.

The truest thing to say about the looming Peak Oil crisis is that, at its heart, it is not primarily about oil at all. If it were that simple, there might just be some grounds for optimism in the search for the magic elixir of an alternative source of fuel. The mere visible tip of the iceberg is our reaching the mid-way point in the exhaustion of global oil supplies. The real problem, of course—the body of the iceberg—is the scale and nature of global human society that easy access to oil has made possible.

Last fall in Massachusetts, I saw road-kill on an unparalleled scale. Seems that in 2003, there had been a bumper harvest of acorns. 2004 had seen a return to normal harvest levels. But so immediate had been the rise in squirrel fertility in response to the increase in food supply, that by the fall, numbers were unsustainably high. The squirrels were taking risks on the road they normally wouldn't, knowing that without additional supplies, they would not make it through the winter. This is ecology at work. It is called die-off. So

it is with all species, even our own.

Oil is astonishingly energy-rich. There is nothing quite like it. A gallon of the stuff will take an average-sized car somewhere

***Just because  
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kind of societies we  
envision.***

in the region of 35 miles. Imagine how many person-hours would be required to push the car that far. Then, reflect on the fact that 150 years ago in the US, 85 percent of all energy expended was muscle-power—draft animals and human power. As we head down the path of oil descent, this is our return destination point.

I have in my library a book that charts the trends in human population for every country in the world since records were kept. In almost every case, the level curve suddenly shoots upwards from the middle of the nineteenth century. Oil was first drilled in Pennsylvania in the 1850s. The chart for England is especially interesting since the records go back to the Domesday book, written almost 1,000 years ago. Before 1750, the population never rises above five million (and on the two occasions that it touches five million, it drops sharply almost immediately afterwards due to plague and resource wars). Today, the population of England is 50 million. The first homework assignment I set my undergraduate students is “Describe the various ways in which we eat oil.” The second is “What will the global human population be in 2100 and why?”

These are among the concerns that are all too easily described by permaculturists and ecovillagers as an “opportunity.” Of course, one understands where they are coming from. Society will have no choice but to take its foot off the accelerator pedal. The huge surpluses on which the great concentrations of power and wealth are dependent will no longer be possible. Life must necessarily become simpler and more decentralised and, to survive, people will need to become much more knowledgeable about the specificities of their own bioregions.

This is very much in congruence with the ecovillage vision. It looks, in broad outline, much like the type of world we are see-

king to model. Moreover, ecovillages are in the forefront of exactly those types of applied research, demonstration, and training that will be required in the transition: saving seeds, developing place-specific technologies for growing food, energy-efficient housing, energy generation, and so on. Perhaps most important of all, ecovillages are modern pioneers in creating a culture based on the abundance of simplicity.

However, appearances can be deceptive and what looks like an opportunity can, on closer inspection, look considerably more threatening. Two implicit beliefs among leaders of the ecovillage and permaculture movements who write on the subject appear to be especially naïve and complacent. The first belief is that the crisis brought upon by dwindling oil supplies will be serious enough to force the disintegration of global capitalism but not so serious as to inflict a wholesale breakdown in the social order. The picture painted all too often (see, for example, David Holgrem’s article in *Permaculture* magazine, #46) is of suburban neighbourhoods needing to do little more than replace their lawns with fruit trees and create some shared play-space. No mention here of an

authoritarian state using the opportunity of crisis to strengthen its powers or of hungry mobs requisitioning food supplies at the point of a gun.

The second belief is that because of the nature of the work we are engaged in, ecovillagers will be the natural inheritors and pioneers of the new age dawning. That, in some sense, we need simply wait for the new Jerusalem to be delivered into our hands. This, I think, is dangerous folly. There are great perils on the post-Peak Oil path that we are embarked on and for ecovillages to even survive, never mind thrive, they are likely to need to change radically.

**Much more plausible is a scenario in which global supply lines crumble and food shortages follow in short order. What follows then is unlikely to be pretty.**



*A recycled whiskey-barrel home in the ecovillage area of Findhorn (left); Planting more trees for Findhorn’s woodlot co-op, which provides firewood to co-op members (right).*

Let us consider how the transition to a state of sustainability is likely to roll out. Richard Heinberg provides powerful arguments to support our common-sense intuition that this is most unlikely to be achieved as part of a consciously chosen and planned power-down strategy. Much more plausible is a scenario in which global supply lines crumble and food shortages follow in short order. What follows then is unlikely to be pretty. Hunger, as I know from two decades working in Africa, is a terrible and degrading thing. It is no friend of appreciative, reasoned argument. It pays scant heed to ideological or aesthetic purity as found in ecovillages.

One thing and one thing alone can serve to keep ecovillages from being swept away in the great hungry tide. That is, they must become so deeply embedded in and of service to their own local social economies that the more conventional surrounding communities will protect them. It is only if ecovillage R&D and training activities are geared specifically to the post-Peak Oil needs of their surrounding populations that this is likely to happen.

Yet, all too often, relations between ecovillages and their surrounding communities are strained. Ecovillages, especially those

that are dependent on income from educational activities, often prioritise relations with their consumer base or ideological allies in cities and countries far away over those with their immediate neighbours. This breeds the kind of resentment that will serve us ill in a post-Peak Oil world.

Moreover, the great majority of places that call themselves ecovillages are simply too small to be called, in any meaningful sense, centres of research, demonstration, and training appropriate to the needs of the times to come. By becoming marginally more self-reliant in food and having one or two energy-generating devices, small groups of well-meaning people are most unlikely to be considered sufficiently relevant to the well-being of their surrounding communities as to be worth protecting.

Here at the Findhorn Foundation ecovillage, all our marketing for educational courses is now

geared towards the UK. Having taught undergraduates from universities in the US for some years, we are now dialoguing with Scottish universities to explore the development of local partnerships. Our organic CSA farm serves many local consumers outside of the ecovillage. Our theatre draws crowds in from the surrounding areas for a vibrant diet of concerts, theatre, and cinema.



*Findhorn's workshops and educational courses are no longer marketed internationally, but to the United Kingdom, and college credit sought from Scottish universities.*

FINDHORN FOUNDATION

***Ecovillages must become so deeply embedded in and of service to their own local social economies that the more conventional surrounding communities will protect them.***

This is a growing trend in the ecovillage movement. The German ecovillage, ZEGG, won several awards in 2005 (including the European Ecovillage Excellence Award) for its work in taking innovations developed within the ecovillage out into its bioregion. The Auroville community in India is ever more engaged in ecological restoration and social justice campaigning in support of local people. Ecovillage at Ithaca in upstate New York is deeply tied into its local educational landscape and is an active player in a programme to make Tompkins County the lowest ecological-footprint county in the US.

We are headed in the right direction, but there is a long way to go—and the time is short. Ecovillages are all too often caught between the present requirement to cater to the needs of their paymasters (those

workshop participants, often living far away, paying for the ecovillage's educational courses) and the impending imperative to be of primary service to their own bioregion. Resolving or transcending this conflict in ways that keep us financially afloat in the short term and locally integrated in the long term is the heart of the journey that lies before us.



*Author Jonathan Dawson*

*Jonathan Dawson is President of Global Ecovillage Network (GEN) and Executive Secretary of GEN-Europe. He has worked in community economic development in Africa over the last 20 years as a project manager, researcher, author, and consultant. He lives at Findhorn Foundation in Scotland where he teaches courses on applied sustainability up to graduate level.*

*(Note: We preserve the spelling of our Commonwealth country authors.)*



Group members from the first Peak Oil Leadership Training held at the Stelle Community in December 2005.

# Helping Friends and Neighbors Prepare

Let's say we want to share the likely consequences of Peak Oil with others. Where do we start? One way is by participating in the "Peak Oil Workshop for Community Leaders," a workshop sponsored by The Community Solution organization in Yellow Springs, Ohio, which trains ordinary people from all walks of life to be effective neighborhood Peak Oil teachers.

Twenty-two people from across North America gathered in December at Stelle, a partially off-grid rural intentional community south of Chicago, to become the first graduates of this training. Participants came from diverse locations and backgrounds, including a pharmaceutical salesman and an HVAC specialist, both from Ohio; a forensic scientist from Wisconsin; a perma-

culture expert from Chicago; and a waitress from Ontario, Canada.

"I came to this workshop to learn the skills and the tools I need to bring this issue before my friends and family and community," said Donna Cook, a retired grade school teacher from Chico, California. "I'm not sure I want to step into that arena, but I feel as if I'm called to do so."

The workshop included sessions on explaining Peak Oil, preparing and giving presentations, and working with community groups. Participants explored strategies for explaining Peak Oil through telling stories about themselves and their own fossil fuel use, and sharing statistics on declining worldwide oil discoveries, increasing demand, and rising US dependence on foreign oil. The next step is to address common alternatives to oil such as coal, nuclear, and renewable energy sources.

BY MEGAN QUINN



Participants also learned to paint a bigger picture for audiences by showing rising fossil fuel use throughout the industrial era and describing the resource conflicts that may break out over diminishing supplies if Americans try to maintain their way of life instead of reducing energy use.

The group was advised to balance crisis with opportunity by discussing both the stark consequences of economic collapse and global conflict as well as the possibilities for people taking action in their own lives and communities.

Participants were taught how to find an audience through contacting local environmental and social justice organizations, civic groups, professional organizations, government bodies, schools, friends, and relatives. They were trained how to select and use various presentation formats—from a 45-minute PowerPoint presentation to a five-minute talk with no visual aids.

***“What stuck out for me was the need to reframe the issue. Peak Oil is not the problem—our way of life is the problem.”***

They learned that it is important to speak at an audience’s level of understanding and interest, welcome questions after a presentation, and have handouts to supplement a talk and provide speaker contact information. To practice answering frequently asked questions on Peak Oil, participants worked out responses and shared them with the group.

“If we use the land to raise crops to make ethanol, we may not have enough to grow our food,” said Annie-Dunn Watson, a professor at Burlington College in Vermont, in response to a question about ethanol as a replacement for gasoline to power motor vehicles. She will teach a college course on Peak Oil this year.

“What stuck out for me was the need to reframe the issue,” said Liz Logan, a communication educator from Atlanta. “Peak Oil is not the problem—our way of life is the problem.”

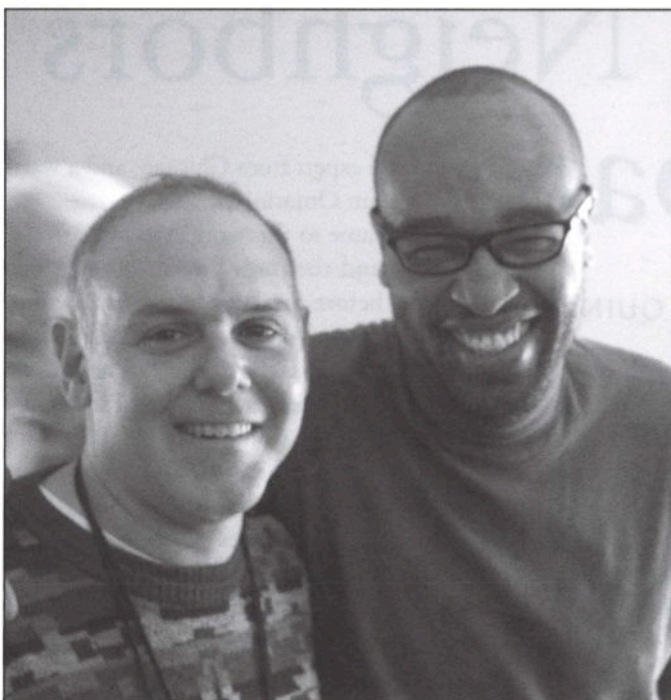
Linda Leslie, an investigator for the state of Missouri, observed: “You’re telling someone something that they don’t want to hear, something that will cause them grief ... but they will sense our passion for this subject and that will convince them more than all of the statistics.”

Workshop trainers were Pat Murphy, Faith Morgan, and myself of The Community Solution, and volunteers Jifunza Wright-Carter, a holistic health physician and experienced facilitator, and Karen Berney, a Dayton-based community health consultant.

Berney, who has trained community health workers in Africa for 30 years, gave participants pointers on helping individuals and groups to understand the issues and encouraging them to act.

“The goal of Peak Oil education is to bring about change in people’s knowledge, attitudes, and practices,” Berney said. “To do so they must take ownership of the problem and develop their own solutions.”

She added that adults learn best when they feel respected as responsible and self-directed learners, their knowledge and experience are valued, and they see how the information is relevant to their lives.



Participants also prepared short presentations for evaluation, simulated a community meeting, and developed community action plans to implement with The Community Solution's help.

They left the workshop inspired and willing to get to work in their communities. In just two examples, Mel Hutto, a former minister from Washington State, will establish "Peak Oil Education of Bellingham" to spread awareness in his community through presentations and conferences, and Michael Brownlee and Lynette Marie Hanthorn of Boulder, Colorado will continue hosting a local resource group focused on food, energy, and health care, among other topics.



MEGAN QUINN

Workshop graduates will share their experiences at The Community Solution's "Third US Conference on Peak Oil and Community Solutions" in Yellow Springs, Ohio Sept. 22-24, 2006. Please contact us (see below) for information about the next Peak Oil Leadership Training. "This crisis will affect everyone on the planet," said participant Kathy Townsend of Nebraska. "We can't leave any group out in terms of who we connect with and present to, because it's sink or swim together."

*Megan Quinn has been writing and speaking on the issue of Peak Oil for three years and is currently the outreach director for The Community Solution, a program of Community Service Inc. in Yellow Springs, Ohio. [www.communitysolution.org](http://www.communitysolution.org); [megan@communitysolution.org](mailto:megan@communitysolution.org); 937-767-2161.*

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GUY PROUTY

*Ecovillage members and representatives from the Cowichan Nation plant a peace pole at O.U.R. Ecovillage.*

# Preparing *for a* Post-Carbon World:

## Why I'm Joining O.U.R. Ecovillage

BY GUY PROUTY, PH.D.

**D**uring the summer of 2005, I participated in an intensive natural building course at O.U.R. Ecovillage on Vancouver Island in British Columbia. Although my main purpose was to learn how to build structures with cob and strawbale, I also wanted to begin living and working in a community that is striving for a self-sufficient, sustainable future, a community that I believe will meet the challenges of a post-carbon world.

I had a rude awakening in November 2000, when G.W. Bush was selected as President of the United States, and then again in March 2003, when the US started a war against Iraq. I began to do extensive research on the reasons for the invasion. I soon came to the conclusion that the government and private US corporations with military contracts wanted to privatize Iraq's nat-

ural resources, particularly oil, and build permanent military bases to gain a foothold in the Middle East that would put the United States in control of the region's oil fields. The United States has known for at least three decades that the threat of Peak Oil would pose a large threat to the world's economy and the maintenance and "growth" of our highly consumptive lifestyle.

By training, I am an anthropologist and archaeologist. I know that when past civilizations pursued domination of others through force to enrich their coffers and exploit natural resources—Rome being an excellent example—it ultimately led to economic and sociopolitical collapse. I soon came to believe that the United States would follow this same course in its search for oil. And when this happens, it will have global consequences since our world's



economies are intricately tied to each other. Despite the power and wealth of the world's minority elite, they (and the rest of us) cannot escape the consequences of our actions. There are simply too many people vying for limited natural resources, and the environmental and economic costs are simply too high.

I knew that one of the solutions to meeting the upcoming challenge was to seek out a lifestyle where people could work together building their homes, practicing permaculture and growing their own food, living off the grid, and using alternative energies. And most importantly, I wanted to help create a "community lifeboat," so that when times get tough we can depend on each other for not only our survival,

***I wanted to help create a "community lifeboat."***

but also our empowerment as human beings, creating a more sustainable and healthy lifestyle that has less impact on the planet.

At O.U.R. Ecovillage, although we are still in the planning stages, I can see great potential in achieving these goals. This will not be easy, of course, as there are multiple challenges we must face—personal and community finances, interpersonal relationships, and weaning ourselves off oil as the basis not only for transportation and heating but for almost everything we take for granted in our modern lifestyle. In my view, this will be a growing and fulfilling experience for everyone involved as we raise our consciousness and create peace, stewardship, and simplicity.

I definitely experienced this on a particular day last summer at O.U.R. Ecovillage when about 100 people, including several elders of the indigenous Cowichan nation, gathered around on "Vision Hill" to plant a peace pole. From that time forward, I knew in my heart and spirit that ecovillages and other intentional communities can foster trust, understanding, and acceptance, and these qualities—necessary for our economic and spiritual survival—will pull us through the difficult and challenging times we face

in the near future in life after Peak Oil. Perhaps Peak Oil is a blessing in disguise because it forces humanity, wittingly or unwittingly, to pursue a lifestyle that communities such as O.U.R. Ecovillage can provide to its members and neighbors.

*Guy Prouty is an archaeologist and Instructor of Anthropology at Eastern Oregon and Oregon State Universities and specializes in the prehistory of North American Indians and the rise and fall of prehistoric civilizations. He currently lives in Eugene, Oregon.*



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# Living the *(Almost)* Petrol-Free Life



BY PATRICIA GREENE

*Rob Carr, of Birdsfoot Farm, and Ed Goldstein (right) head off to fell trees the old-fashioned way.*

What would it look like to live a rural life almost free of oil dependency?  
Are there any people in North America living this way now?

**W**ell, I know one—Ed Goldstein, founder of Ness Community in upstate New York, where I live. Let me tell you about his almost “petrol-free” life.

In 1984 Ed was a disillusioned medical student in Rochester, New York. He saw a notice at the local food co-op that the Rural Life Association, an organization of 40 homesteads in the hinterlands of northern New York near the Canadian border, was offering apprenticeships to would-be back-to-the-landers. After visiting several places, Ed decided to apprentice at Birdsfoot Farm, an intentional community and organic farm in Canton, New York.

He convinced his supervisor in medical school that doing an elective in “nutrition” would round out his education, and so spent

the spring of 1984 growing organic vegetables at Birdsfoot. It changed the course of his life.

He worked in the hillside gardens overlooking the Little River Valley and fell in love with the area, with the community way of life, and with working the earth. It was a wet spring and one major task was digging a drainage ditch to help with runoff. For the first time, he fully understood the value both socially and physically of people doing that kind work together instead of bringing in a noisy gas-guzzling machine.

By the end of the spring, Ed was determined to come back and explore the simple homesteading lifestyle. He began to develop ideas of voluntary simplicity as a way of taking care of the Earth and returned to the area as soon as his formal med-

ical training was over. A friend he met at Birdsfoot agreed to let him live on her land. He spent that first summer chopping wood and hauling water, bathing in the river, and getting to know the trees. He learned to forage, garden, and wildcraft, and started poring over the *Foxfire* books, fascinated by how country people did things before oil and high technology.

Soon he began to build a small cabin with hand tools. "It's all about finesse and technique rather than force. I learned these tools are incredibly powerful if they're well-tuned and you're not in a hurry. Of course, I had time because I could meet my expenses, which were pretty minimal, by working three or four days a month at the local hospital."

Once that cabin was done, Ed was itching to try timber-framing. His parents helped him buy 100 acres of woods, meadow, cliff, and riverfront—which later became Ness Community—a gift that allowed him to settle in and further develop his new skills. He picked a site on the land way down in the woods near a spring and began to fell trees with a crosscut saw and axe for a workshop and a 12x16' saltbox cabin. He taught himself to hew, notch, and join the beams, to be more patient, and to ask for help.

"I loved the quiet and the fact that I could build a house with the tools I could carry in one box," he says. After moving in, he carried water, cut his firewood by hand, and began to collect old hand tools. He created a root cellar out of well tiles, collected rainwater off the roof, made string from the bark of basswood trees, and tanned deer hide by soaking it in hemlock bark. He had found a simple and joyful way of life that made sense to him.

Five years later he and a neighbor built a small sawmill that he later converted to run on biodiesel, found a carpenter and a friend willing to help him, and began work on the 1,000 square foot "mansion" he now lives in with his wife, Alison McGin. All onsite building was done by hand. "Not even a battery-operated screw gun," he says with a grin. This time he indulged in the luxuries of a basement/root cellar that serves as refrigerator in the warmer months and safe storage in the colder months. He also put up solar panels and used recycled batteries to run his lights, got a telephone, dug a shallow well, and installed a hand pump, built a bath house with wood-fired hot water, and bought a top-of-the-line cast-iron wood cook stove for both heating and cooking.

Ed has never used propane gas or lamp oil. In the summer, he and Alison cook in their summer kitchen or over a campfire and in the outside earth oven she constructed. They push-mow the



Ed (right) and his wife, Alison McGin, use a two-person crosscut saw to cut up a maple tree.

open areas around their large garden, fenced with posts split by hand, and have developed a composting system using recycled tires, in which humanure compost is created from both household waste and waste from their outhouse bucket toilet. They take showers in the summer with an old metal watering can rigged up in a tree or the swimming hole in the river. They do laundry by hand with the help of a wringer. Their water system allows them to bring water from the well or from a rainwater holding tank and dump it in an outside funnel, which goes down into

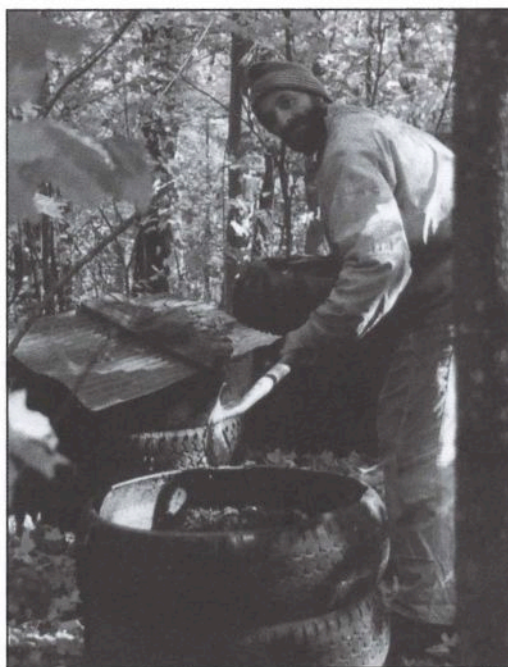
a basement holding tank. Soon they will have a hand pump to bring water up to the kitchen sink. For now they don't have "running" water, but rather "walking" water, that Ed carries in buckets upstairs to a 15-gallon tank that gravity-feeds to the sink.

The trickiest part of this nearly petrol-free life has always been transport. The land is about ten miles from town, work, and most friends. At first Ed used the smallest car he could find, a three-cylinder Subaru Justy. In the mid-nineties, he met and became friends with Jimi Merkel, author of the book *Radical Simplicity*, and was deeply affected by Jimi's story of going carless after the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Jimi and his partner bicycled everywhere, even from British Columbia to New England to see family and give workshops.

"I asked myself, 'If not me, then who; if not now, then when?'," Ed says, "so I sold my car and figured it out from there."

At first, he rode his bike and in winter got to know his neighbors, who offered him rides. "This style of living makes you depend on people's good will and that's a wonderful thing," he says. Eventually he acquired a high-tech Green Speed tricycle and has become a familiar sight along local roads as he pedals every-

**If he had a full-time job off the land, he would not be able to put in the time his lifestyle demands.**



Ed's recycled-tire composting system for household waste and humanure compost.

where in the warmer months. When he married Alison, they wanted to be more socially mobile, and began to experiment with biofuels. After acquiring an old diesel VW Jetta, he read up and found a mechanic down the road willing to help him convert the car to a veggie-oil mobile. The local diner was more than willing to give him used oil and he began filtering it in his shop.

It took many months to perfect the techniques, and now on his second veggie mobile, he fearlessly packs away extra oil and takes long trips. Recently, he and Alison drove over 500 miles on less than ten gallons of waste vegetable oil. Cold North Country winters mean he must start the car on regular diesel fuel until the engine heats up, then switch to biofuels, either biodiesel if it's a short trip, or veggie oil for longer trips, which requires more heat from the motor. Because handling the fuel is labor intensive, and for the obvious environmental reasons, he uses the car as little as possible.

Other important lifestyle considerations are meaningful for Ed, who is committed to having as little negative impact on the biosphere as possible. He tries to consider the true cost of his consumption and thinks carefully before bringing anything on the land that can't be safely burned, recycled, reused, or composted.

"When you take personal responsibility for your own garbage and realize that the landfill is not a viable option if you want to be sustainable, it dramatically changes the way you live," he says. "Whenever possible we avoid buying things in unnecessary packaging, which is getting more and more difficult. We buy locally grown food, often in bulk, and do a lot of canning. We hunt for our meat, and try to eat in season, although I do have a weakness for Ben and Jerry's every once in a while. We try not to buy machines that will break down and can't be refurbished. We don't own a computer. We use second-hand things and creatively find new uses for what wears out."

Ed is the first to admit that he lives a privileged life. He doctors at the local jail two days a week. If he had a full-time job

off the land, he would not be able to put in the time his lifestyle demands. For instance, getting in four face cords of firewood by hand takes many pleasant and meditative hours of the winter. But he and Alison live comfortably, even luxuriously, with basic monthly expenses of about \$600 a month. Their main bill is the phone bill, which is high because Ed likes to visit without using the car and gives medical phone consultations to the surrounding community.

Having a partner to share the labor, work side-by-side with him, and put up with his obsessions has been a huge pleasure. Ed also believes this lifestyle works best and is most satisfying with a community, both immediate and extended. "I don't do this to get away from society or be a recluse," he says. "When you have limits on technology, you actually need people more. I learned that from the old-order Amish that live nearby. In the alternative community that flourishes around here, we've had numerous house raisings. It's very satisfying to work and play together."

From the beginning, Ed dreamed of this land being home to an intentional community. "This way of life demands a village," he says. Over the years, people have come to Ness Community to learn to live more simply. Some built small handmade and recycled houses, built a barn, and planted a common garden. There have been as many as nine people living here; currently it's six. With the coming oil crisis, no doubt more will begin to realize that to live with deep awareness of the environmental cost of daily life and the dedication to walk the talk, we need to have limits on technology, live within our bioregions—and we need each other.

### ***"This way of life demands a village."***

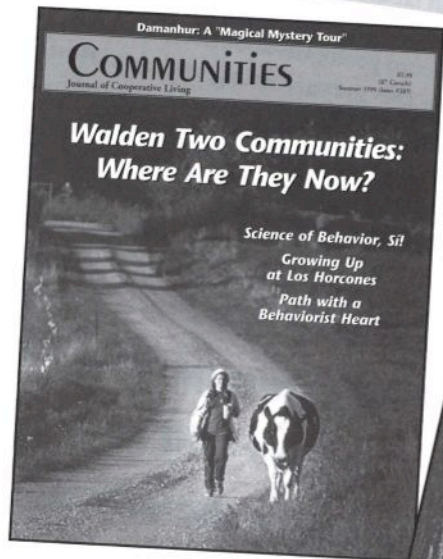
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*Patricia Greene lives in a small, off-grid cabin at Ness Community. A published novelist who has just finished her second novel set in (surprise!) an intentional community, she coordinates advertising for Communities magazine and runs the North Country Sustainable Energy Fair. [patricia@ic.org](mailto:patricia@ic.org); 315-347-3070.*



*Ed has been collecting beautiful old hand tools for 20 years (left). Some Ness Community members and friends at dinner: Ed, right; author Patricia Greene, second from right.*

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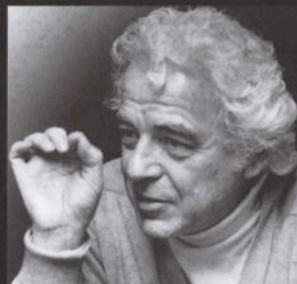
# THE ART OF CO-OPERATION

## THE ART OF CO-OPERATION



Benjamin Creme

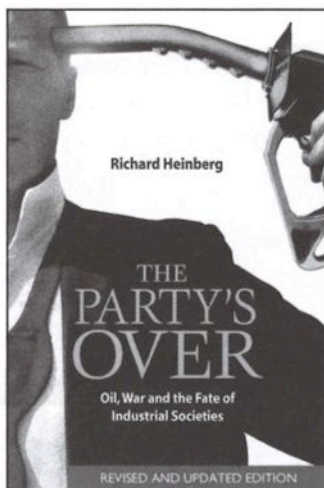
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# REVIEWS



## *The Party's Over: Oil, War, and the Fate of Industrial Societies, Revised and Updated Edition*

By Richard Heinberg

New Society Publishers, 2005

(first edition, 2003)

Pb. 306 pp., \$17.95

*Reviewed by Diana Leafé Christian*

Richard Heinberg's *The Party's Over* and *Powerdown* are two of the most well-known and often-cited books for the layperson about the complex, interwoven, often ephemeral Peak Oil issues. First published in 2003 and revised and updated in 2005, *The Party's Over* is an accessible, thorough, and multi-disciplinary guide to how we've reached the mid-point of worldwide oil reserves and the likely imminent consequences. We learn about the interlocking series of causes and effects that demonstrate how and why the rising cost of the remaining oil will trigger rising costs of all goods and services, and how this will affect

every aspect of daily life. Heinberg teases apart the layers of issues—from the bloom, overshoot, and die-off phases of the human species, to the consistent attempts of militaristic societies throughout history to control energy resources—cattle, horses, human labor, wood, coal, oil. He explores the seemingly irrefutable conclusions of petroleum geologists about oil-field depletions; the prevaricating and denial of economists, oil companies, and governments; and the inability of even the most promising alternative oil sources, like tar sands, or the best sustainable technologies, like hydrogen fuel cells—to make a difference widely enough or quickly enough. He examines the United States' perilous

***Petroleum geologists  
say we will start  
seeing the effects  
anytime now.***

“expand or collapse” debt-based economy and its recent military actions in oil-producing nations.

I'm assuming that most readers may be aware by now that it's taken about 150 years to use up half the available oil in oil fields worldwide: in other words, for oil to “peak.” During that same time, oil, which is the densest, most portable, and most energy-rich resource the world has ever known—and which until recently has been extremely cheap—has given rise to exponentially larger food supplies, better and faster transportation and distribution networks, cheap home heating, and vast, cheap amounts of electric power. All of this has enabled the world's population to balloon to nearly three and half times what it was when oil was discovered in the 1850s. But it won't take another 150 years to use up the second half of the oil in the ground, since there's now 6.4 billion of us (latest figures say 7 billion), not 2 billion like in the 1850s, and the demand for oil has increased exponentially.

When resources are plentiful and easy to extract (or take from others by force) Heinberg says, it's boom time. Think North America up to the 1970s, or the Roman

Empire. Populations expand, people make money, and societies get larger, more complex, and more specialized. But when a resource is limited and increasingly difficult to get—like oil is now becoming—it's bust time. People go hungry, many starve, disease becomes rampant, epidemics abound, populations shrink, the remaining population is much poorer, complex societies get simpler, large empires or nations break up into their component parts. Are we starting "bust" times now? Petroleum geologists predict we will start seeing the effects anytime now (if not already, with evermore costly gasoline and food prices), and certainly in the next ten years, with geometrically increasing, escalating effects over the next two decades and beyond. The "Age of Oil" will not be a historical "age" after all, Peak Oil analysts observe, but a relatively short "oil interval," of perhaps 200 years at most.

Heinberg thoroughly examines the results of Peak Oil in terms of the economy, transportation, food and agriculture, heating and cooling, the environment, public health, and geopolitics—adding up to "a century of impending famine, disease, economic collapse, despotism, and resource wars."

Governments could respond by stopping societal dependence on oil and preparing for a return to an oil-less society, through a set of simultaneous programs to conserve energy (subsidizing public transportation, promoting alternative energy sources), promote as much local and bioregional food self-reliance as possible, and offer incentives to limit population and slow the birth rate. Or, they could grab control of other nations' oil fields—the greed-and-grasp consciousness instead of the conserve-and-cooperate consciousness.

Heinberg's recommendations for what we can do, individually and in our communities and nations, parallel the sustainability practices many ecovillages

and intentional communities are doing now. (See photos illustrating "Community Survival during the Coming Energy Decline," pg. 24-31.) And Heinberg knows this. "Life in an intentional community could offer many advantages," he writes. "Association with like-minded people in a context of mutual aid could help overcome many of the challenges that will arise as the larger society undergoes turmoil and reorganization. Moreover, new cooperative, low-energy ways of living can be implemented now, without having to wait for a majority of people in the larger society to awaken to the necessity for change."

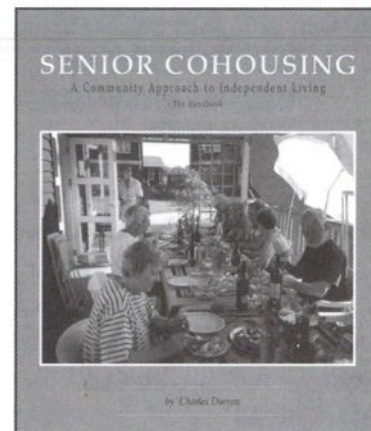
He goes on to recommend ecovillages, including Findhorn, Mitraniketan in India, EcoVillage at Ithaca, The Farm, and Earthaven, and also Dancing Rabbit, which he visited and describes briefly.

Heinberg's aim in *The Party's Over*, he says, is not to depress or demoralize us, but to alert people to what's happening so we can do something about it. "We have to respond cooperatively, with

compassion and intelligence in a way that minimizes human suffering in the short term," he writes, "and for the long term, helping future generations to develop sustainable, materially modest societies that affirm the highest and best qualities of human nature." His ideal scenario is a smaller, slower, and more locally based society, motivated not by competition but cooperation, not boundless growth, but self-limitation. This could lead to a world 100 years from now, he says, "with fewer people using less energy per capita, all of it from renewable sources, while enjoying a quality of life that the typical industrial urbanite of today would perhaps envy."

*Diana Leafe Christian is editor of Communities magazine, and author of Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities.*

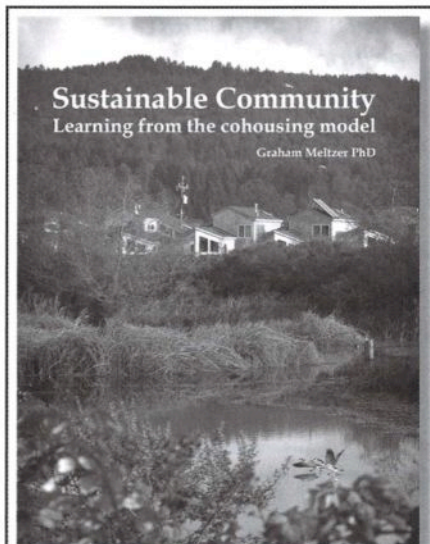
**Oil has resulted in exponentially larger food supplies and the world's population ballooning to nearly three and a half times what it was in the 1850s.**



**Senior Cohousing: A Community Approach to Independent Living. The Handbook.** by Charles Durrett, Habitat Press, 2005.

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## COMMUNITY FOOD SECURITY

(continued from p. 41)

For impoverished and oppressed communities already grappling with chronic food insecurity, the impact of Peak Oil may appear to bring little change. But because they can least stomach additional reduction of an affordable and nutritious food supply, they could be hardest hit. Much analysis of Peak Oil's probable effects—led by the landmark film *The End of Suburbia*—has focused on the crisis expected to jolt relatively wealthy suburban areas. Greater attention must also be paid to urban communities and to the food justice issues certain to erupt if industrial agribusiness falters or fails.

### Relocalization

The common thread running throughout all of these models of community food security is "relocalization," or the revitalization of local water, food, and energy security through grassroots community-based movements. And while we can all be inspired and galvanized by learning what activists and growers elsewhere are doing to prepare for *their* energy-constrained future, the ideal way to determine what might work best for one's own community, in a unique bioregion, might be simply to gather (perhaps over a potlatch of locally harvested food?) with friends and neighbors, brainstorm and discuss the challenges, and develop local plans of action.

Toward that end, the Post-Carbon Institute (PCI) has established their most important initiative, the Relocalization Network. Since January 2005, this Network has grown from five groups, or "outposts," in local communities to over fifty in eight different countries. They are, in essence, community-based extensions of the Post-Carbon Institute, operating autonomously while receiving guidance and electronic infrastructure from the Institute. They work cooperatively in their community with local government, business, NGOs, and educational institutions to put theory about living with fewer hydrocarbons into practice while sharing knowledge and experiences with the global network of people working on relocalization. To learn more or join, visit [www.relocalize.net](http://www.relocalize.net).

One noteworthy example is the Willits Economic Localization (WELL). In a semi-rural municipality of Mendocino County in Northern California, WELL started in late 2004 following a series of viewings of *The End of Suburbia* and hours of public dialogue concerning "what to do." It now comprises about 80 community members who regularly attend meetings and is governed by a Steering Committee of 12 people operating on 80 percent supermajority voting.

A seminal accomplishment by WELL was their City government's unanimous adoption of a "Joint Statement towards a Sustainable, Healthy Willits," affirming that the solutions to "issues such as climate change and fossil fuel depletion" are in "returning to small, local community enterprises." In turn, WELL is forming partnerships with local farmers, investors, and renewable energy developers, and has researched and published "community inventories" of key resources including water, food, energy, and medicine. A new "biointensive" garden, which aims to grow a complete diet and maintain or improve soil fertility by composting crop residue, is planned. Media attention to WELL's efforts has been considerable.<sup>[10]</sup>

As WELL takes the lead to prepare their community for petrocollapse, others around the world look to learn from the trail they've blazed—and WELL relishes the opportunity to instruct. (See "Essential Questions about Food Security," pg. 40.)

Each community, in the pursuit of answers to inform their course of action and through the process of realizing them, must embark on an independent path to food security. The recipe of relocalization will have different and authentic ingredients for each who try it. A capacity for creative experimentation and improvisation will be crucial. For some, stranded on land too degraded, waterless, overpopulated, or otherwise inhospitable without the artificial crutch of fossil fuels, the journey may be impossible. But for most, the oil crash is a challenge that should be surmountable, and can help drive a rediscovery of local self-sufficiency and community solidarity which is long overdue. So without further ado: What first steps must your community take to make your diet Peak Oil-proof?




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**Apr 7-9 • Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC) Spring Organizational Meeting**

Madison, Wisconsin. Planning, policies, reports, consensus decision making by FIC board members, staff, and volunteers. FIC publishes *Communities* magazine, *Communities Directory*, distributes *Visions of Utopia* video, and operates [ic.org](http://ic.org) website and Community Bookshelf mailorder book service. Hosted by Madison Community Cooperative. Public invited. [jenny@ic.org](mailto:jenny@ic.org).

**Apr 14-16 • Rites of Spring: A Weekend of Celebrating Brotherhood**

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**April 21-23 • Starting a Successful Ecovillage or Intentional Community**

Easton Mountain Retreat Center, Greenwich, NY. Diana Leafe Christian, editor, *Communities* magazine, and author, *Creating a Life Together*. Overview costs & time-frames; vision documents, decision making, finding/financing land; legal structures; financial organization; process & communication skills. \$95, lunches, no accommodations; \$195, incl. workshop, camping, meals; additional for indoor accommodations. [www.eastonmountain.com](http://www.eastonmountain.com); [info@eastonmountain.com](mailto:info@eastonmountain.com); 800-553-8235; 518-692-8023.

**Apr 21-24 • Heart Of Now: The Basics**  
Lost Valley Educational Center, Dexter, OR. (Formerly "Naka-Ima.") Part one of experiential workshop about realizing your vision and facing and dissolving the obstacles in the way of being fully and authentically yourself. Through the practice of honesty, in the context of supportive and loving community, we will explore how to be alive, in the moment, and deeply connected with others. Donation, incl. lodging, meals. \$50 registration deposit; suggested additional contribution \$300-\$650. [www.lostvalley.org](http://www.lostvalley.org); [info@lostvalley.org](mailto:info@lostvalley.org); 541-937-3351, #109.

**April 22 • Colorado Cohousing Bus Tour**  
Denver/Boulder, Colorado. Day-long bus tour: Hearthstone Cohousing (Denver), Harmony Village (Golden), Nyland Cohousing (Lafayette), Wild Sage and Silver Sage Cohousing (Boulder), and Lyons Valley Village (Lyons). Wonderland Hill Development Company. \$85, incl. lunch. [www.whdc.com](http://www.whdc.com); [sharon@whdc.com](mailto:sharon@whdc.com); 303-449-3232, x203.

**Apr 24-27 • Introduction to Natural Building**  
Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm, Summertown, TN. (See Apr 21-23. Instructors are Howard Switzer, Katey Culver, Matt English, Albert Bates, and guests.)

**May 1-5 • Ecovillage Training Center Volunteer Week**  
Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm, Summertown, TN. Help us finish some natu-

ral building projects in progress and get a sense of what it is like living here. If you were interested in maybe taking a workshop or apprenticeship but concerned about whether you can afford it, here is an easy and less costly way to get a closer look. [www.thefarm.org](http://www.thefarm.org); [ecovillage@thefarm.org](mailto:ecovillage@thefarm.org); 931-964-4324.

**May 7-13 • Midwifery Assistant Workshop**  
The Farm, Summertown, TN. Learn the skills and knowledge needed to assist a practicing midwife in home or birth center deliveries. \$795, incl. lodging, two meals/day. *The Farm Midwifery Workshops*, PO Box 217, Summertown, TN 38483; [midwives@thefarm.org](mailto:midwives@thefarm.org); 931-964-2472.

**May 12-15 • Heart of Now: The Basics**  
Lost Valley Educational Center, Dexter, OR. (See Apr 21-24)

**May 13-14, Jun 18-19, Jul 15-16, Aug 19-20, Sep 6-7 • Permaculture Fundamentals**  
Earthaven Ecovillage, Black Mountain, NC. Patricia Allison, Chuck Marsh & others. Five-weekend course—part I of Permaculture Design Course. Topics: sustainability, integrated human ecosystems, food forests and local foodsheds, processing human waste, natural building and appropriate technology, economic strategies, sustainability in the city, healing cultural wounds. Plus hands-on garden work, pond-making, natural building, graywater systems, erosion control, rock work, dances, circles, campfires. \$650 for all 5 weekends, incl. food, camping. Indoor lodging also available. [www.earthaven.org](http://www.earthaven.org); [ehpa@directway.com](mailto:ehpa@directway.com); 828-664-0076.

**May 16-21 • Lost Valley Community Experience Week**  
Lost Valley Educational Center, Dexter, OR. Immersion in Lost Valley community life: shared meals, work parties, community meetings, and more. [www.lostvalley.org](http://www.lostvalley.org); [info@lostvalley.org](mailto:info@lostvalley.org); 541-937-3351, #109.

**May 20-21 • Wise Woman Ways of Herbal Medicine**  
Earthaven Ecovillage, Black Mountain, NC. Second of four-weekend fundamentals course. (See Apr 21-23.)

**May 27 • Edible Wild Plants Workshop**  
Earthaven Ecovillage, Black Mountain, NC. Learn how to identify, harvest, and prepare common wild medicinal plants. W/Corinna Wood, Red Moon Herbs. \$55-\$85, sl. sc. [www.earthaven.org](http://www.earthaven.org); [info@redmoonherbs.com](mailto:info@redmoonherbs.com); 828-350-1221.

**May 28 • Hands-on Herbal Medicine Making**  
Earthaven Ecovillage, Black Mountain, NC. Learn to make your own herbal medicines with maximum potency. Infusions, tinctures, vinegars, salves, and oils from fresh, local plants. W/Corinna Wood, Red Moon Herbs. \$55-\$85, sl. sc. [www.earthaven.org](http://www.earthaven.org); [info@redmoonherbs.com](mailto:info@redmoonherbs.com); 828-350-1221.

**May 31-June 16 • Permaculture Design Certification Course**

O.U.R. Ecovillage, Vancouver Island, Canada. Tyrone LaFay (director/founder) of Earthcare Design Solutions. 17-day intensive course that meets, and actually exceeds, standard requirements of the Permaculture Institute in Australia. Fully residential, \$1,400CAN, incl. meals, camping; Non-residential, \$1,200CAN; PDC graduate refresher course, \$500CAN. [www.ourecovillage.org](http://www.ourecovillage.org); [our@pacificcoast.net](mailto:our@pacificcoast.net); 250-743-3067.

**May 31-Aug 25 • Permaculture & Sustainable Community Design Internship**

O.U.R. Ecovillage, Vancouver Island, Canada. Module 1: 17-day Permaculture Design Certificate Course (see May 31-Jun 16, above); Module 2: 10-week Internship Program. Full community immersion, instruction, individual and group hands-on projects to enhance and expand skills learned within PDC course. Community building, permaculture, whole-systems design, Nonviolent Communication, decision-making processes, personal leadership, local indigenous wisdom. Each participant will develop an experimental garden plot and help run community organic food production systems (no-till, bio-dynamic, bio-and French-intensive, permaculture). Field trips. Instructors: Tyrone LaFay and others. Modules 1 & 2, \$4,400CAN, incl. meals, camping; Module 2 only (must hold PDC Certificate), \$3,900CAN, incl. meals, camping. Partial scholarships available. Optional—stay through Sep 29 for practicum focused on harvesting, food processing, and seed saving. [www.ourecovillage.org](http://www.ourecovillage.org); [our@pacificcoast.net](mailto:our@pacificcoast.net); 250-743-3067.

**Jun 4-8 • Common Sense and Tradition: Workshop for Midwives**

This class is for practicing midwives, nurse midwife students, advanced midwife students and labor and delivery nurses. Please contact us for a complete schedule/curriculum for this workshop. This workshop offers continuing education units from the Midwifery Education and Accreditation Council (MEAC) and the American College of Nurse Midwives (ACNM). \$650, incl. lodging, two meals/day. *The Farm Midwifery Workshops, PO Box 217, Summertown, TN 38483*; [midwives@thefarm.org](mailto:midwives@thefarm.org); 931-964-2472.

**Jun 5-Jul 28 • Natural Building in Community**

Emerald Earth, Boonville, CA. Michael G. Smith, Darryl Berlin, and guests. Strawbale, cob, straw-clay, round pole framing, natural plasters and paints, adobe floors, alternative foundations and roofs, passive solar design, home power generation, and more. For owner-builders and people pursuing careers in natural building. \$3000 incl. camping, meals, field trips. [www.emeraldearth.org](http://www.emeraldearth.org); [workshops@emeraldearth.org](mailto:workshops@emeraldearth.org); 707-972-3096.

**Jun 6-8 • Introduction to Natural Building**

Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm, Summertown, TN. (See Apr 21-23)

**Jun 9-11 • EcoVillage at Ithaca Experience Weekend**

EcoVillage at Ithaca, Ithaca, NY. Enjoy a balance of nature connection, personal renewal, and hands-on learning—harvesting organic produce at onsite CSA farm, building a root cellar, exploring ecological lifestyle changes. Place-based learning, land stewardship, green building, renewable energy systems, consensus decision making, building cooperative community. Swimming in the pond, exploring Ithaca's famous gorges. \$200- \$250 sl. sc. (incl. meals, lodging), local resident rates \$150-200 sl. sc. *EcoVillage at Ithaca, 100 Rachel Carson Way, Ithaca, NY 14850*; [www.ecovillage.ithaca.ny.us](http://www.ecovillage.ithaca.ny.us); [ecovillage@cornell.edu](mailto:ecovillage@cornell.edu); 607-256-0000, 607-272-5149.

**Jun 10 • Editor's Tour of Earthaven**

Earthaven Ecovillage, Black Mountain, NC. Diana Leaf Christian, *Communities* editor and author, *Creating a Life Together: Practical Tools to Grow Ecovillages and Intentional Communities*. Permaculture design applied to an ecovillage (with Patricia Allison), Earthaven history & culture, self-governance, communication & process, natural buildings, Gateway integrated agriculture project, off-grid power, constructed wetlands, roofwater catchment, graywater recycling, village-scale economy, lessons learned, comparison to other ecovillages. \$75, incl. lunch. Optional—overnight lodging (additional charge), Sat. evening Coffeehouse, Sun. afternoon Council meeting. [www.earthaven.org](http://www.earthaven.org); [diana@ic.org](mailto:diana@ic.org); 828-669-9702.

**Jun 16-25 • Post-Petroleum Permaculture Fundamentals**

Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm, Summertown, TN. First half of Permaculture Design Certificate course. Ecology, energy and resource conservation, social and community skills, the economics of environmental sustainability. Field trips to bamboo nursery and local permaculture sites. Albert Bates, Goodheart Brown, Valerie Seitz, Matthew English, Scott Horton, Adam Turtle, other guests. \$1200 incl. meals, lodging. [www.thefarm.org](http://www.thefarm.org); [ecovillage@thefarm.org](mailto:ecovillage@thefarm.org); 931-964-4324.

**June 16-19 • Heart of Now: The Basics**  
Lost Valley Educational Center, Dexter, OR.  
(See Apr 21-24)

**Jun 17-18 • Wise Woman Ways of Herbal Medicine**

Earthaven Ecovillage, Black Mountain, NC. Third of four-weekend fundamentals course. (See Apr 21-23.)

**Jun 18-19 • Permaculture Fundamentals**  
Earthaven Ecovillage, Black Mountain, NC. Part two of five-weekend course. (See May 13-14.)

**Jun 19-Aug 25 • Natural Building Skill Builder**

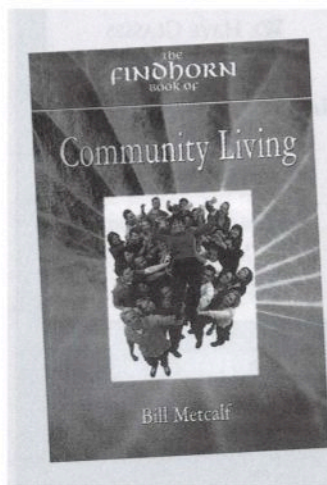
O.U.R. Ecovillage, Vancouver Island, Canada. Elke Cole (Cobworks) and guest presenters. Cob construction, light-clay infill, strawbale and cob finishing, stonework, natural plasters, earthen floors, community life. Background theory and natural house design principles. \$3,900, incl. meals, camping. Elke Cole from Cobworks, Holger Laerad, Mark Mazziotti, and other guest instructors. [www.ourecovillage.org](http://www.ourecovillage.org); [our@pacificcoast.net](mailto:our@pacificcoast.net); 250-743-3067.

**Jun 23-Jul 7 • Permaculture Design Certificate Program**

EcoVersity, Santa Fe, NM. W/Scott Pittman, founder, Permaculture Drylands Institute, and co-founder, Permaculture Credit Union. Permaculture is a practical design system to create settings with the diversity, stability, and resilience of natural ecosystems, and provides tools for building energy-efficient homes, water conservation, alternative waste treatment, soil building, preserving biodiversity, land restoration, erosion control, seed saving, and land stewardship. \$890. *EcoVersity, 2639 Agua Fria Street, Santa Fe, NM 87505*; [www.ecoversity.org](http://www.ecoversity.org); [info@ecoversity.org](mailto:info@ecoversity.org); 505-424-9797.

**June 26-Aug 18 • Ecovillage and Permaculture Certificate Program: Integrating Land, Building**

Lost Valley Educational Center, Dexter, OR. Joshua Smith, Diana Leaf Christian, Mark



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Lakeman, Toby Hemenway, Jude Hobbs, Rob Bolman, Tree Bressen, & others. Two-month residential hands-on, experiential course in creating ecovillages and sustainable communities. Permaculture design certificate course (organic gardening, eco-building, eco-forestry, appropriate technology, community site design), interpersonal communication, organizational and financial issues in community, Lost Valley's personal growth workshops. [www.lostvalley.org](http://www.lostvalley.org); [sustainability@lostvalley.org](mailto:sustainability@lostvalley.org); 541-937-3351.

**Jul 7-9 • Healing Through Food, Gardening, Herbs, and Ceremony**

Occidental Arts & Ecology Center (OAEC), Occidental, CA. Rekindle deeper knowing through plant spirit medicine, medicinal herbs and oils, gardening as a practical/spiritual practice, food as medicine. Weston A. Price's pioneering 1930s nutritional work, herbal oil infusions, salve-making, using hand tools effectively, composting, garden bed preparation, planting, preparing sauerkraut and rejuvenative snacks. Michelle Vesser. \$425/\$375, sl. sc., incl. meals, lodging. [www.oaec.org](http://www.oaec.org); [oaec@oaec.org](mailto:oaec@oaec.org); 707-874-1557.

**Jul 7-16 • Network for a New Culture Summer Camp East**

Near Hancock, MD. New Culture Intensive: An Extended Journey into Love, Community, and Transformation. Building sustainable, nonviolent culture through intimacy, personal growth, emotional transparency, radical hon-

esty, equality, compassion, sexual freedom, and community. \$495-\$895, incl. camping, meals. [www.cfnc.us](http://www.cfnc.us); [sc05e@cfnc.us](mailto:sc05e@cfnc.us); 800-763-8136.

**Jul 8 • Northern California Cohousing Bus Tour**

San Francisco Bay Area: East Bay. Day-long bus tour: Swan's Market Cohousing (Oakland), Berkeley Cohousing, Doyle Street Cohousing (Emeryville), Temescal Commons and Temescal Creek Cohousing (Oakland). \$85, incl. lunch. [www.cohousing.org](http://www.cohousing.org); [tours@cohousing.org](mailto:tours@cohousing.org).

**Jul 8-16 • Creating Sustainable Communities: the Ecological Dimension**

EcoVillage at Ithaca, Ithaca, NY. Introducing ecological foundations of living in more life-enhancing ways. Connection to bioregion & place, sustainable land-use strategies, organic agriculture & local foods, green building & sustainable energy use, personal sustainability & culture change, social & economic dimensions. Brief presentations, hands-on projects, field trips. Part of a month-long curriculum created by GEN's (Global Ecovillage Network) Gaia Education project. Instructors: Liz Walker, co-founder & executive director of EcoVillage at Ithaca, and author, EcoVillage at Ithaca; Elan Shapiro, sustainability educator and consultant, Ithaca College and Cornell University. \$875-\$1050, sl. sc., incl. meals, lodging; \$700, commuters. *EcoVillage at Ithaca, 100 Rachel Carson Way, Ithaca, NY*

14850; [www.ecovillage.ithaca.ny.us](http://www.ecovillage.ithaca.ny.us); [ecovillage@cornell.edu](mailto:ecovillage@cornell.edu); 607-256-0000, 607-272-5149.

**Jul 13-16 • Creating Community in Later Life**

Second Journey, Whidbey Institute, Whidbey Island, WA. Conversation among architects, developers, educators, healthcare professionals, writers, visionaries, and elders about creating meaningful community in later life. What makes a "great place" in which to grow old? How can elders' wisdom be invested back into the community? [www.secondjourney.org](http://www.secondjourney.org); [kenpyburn@yahoo.com](mailto:kenpyburn@yahoo.com); 919-403-0432.

**Jul 14-16 • Woodshop for Women**

Occidental Arts & Ecology Center (OAEC), Occidental, CA. Essential tools and their proper use; safe and effective use of power tools; structural integrity; and basic techniques such as cutting, nailing, drilling, driving, and leveling. Kate Lundquist, guests. \$425/\$375 sl. sc., incl. meals, lodging. [www.oaec.org](http://www.oaec.org); [oaec@oaec.org](mailto:oaec@oaec.org); 707-874-1557.

**July 15-16 • Wise Woman Ways of Herbal Medicine**

Earthaven Ecovillage, Black Mountain, NC. Fourth of four-weekend fundamentals course. (See Apr 21-23.)

**Jul 15-16 • Permaculture Fundamentals**

Earthaven Ecovillage, Black Mountain, NC. Part three of five-weekend course. (See May 13-14.)

**Jul 21-23 • North American Cohousing Conference 2006**

Chapel Hill, NC. Learn from and network with the country's most experienced cohousing residents and professionals. Workshops, "Professionals Day," tours, day-long workshops on topics of special interest. \$240. Additional for lodging, meals. [www.cohousing.org](http://www.cohousing.org); [bratford@sbcglobal.net](mailto:bratford@sbcglobal.net).

**Jul 21-29 • Ecovillage Design and Permaculture Practicum**

Ecovillage Training Center at The Farm, Summertown, TN. Sustainable village design: site selection, master planning, and pattern design for ecovillage; consensus and conflict resolution; financial aspects; work issues; best practices. Ecology, energy and resource conservation, social and community skills, economics of sustainability. Greg Ramsey, Albert Bates, Scott Horton, Valerie Seitz. \$1200, incl. meals, lodging. [www.thefarm.org](http://www.thefarm.org); [ecovillage@thefarm.org](mailto:ecovillage@thefarm.org); 931-964-4324.

**Jul 22-29 • Wise Woman Ways of Herbal Medicine**

Earthaven Ecovillage, Black Mountain, NC. In a circle of women, reweave our deep connection with the plants, the Earth, and ourselves. Women only. W/Corinna Wood, Red Moon Herbs. \$750, incl. meals, camping. Indoor lodging also available.

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# Reach



## COMMUNITIES WITH OPENINGS

**AQUARIAN CONCEPTS COMMUNITY, Sedona, Arizona.** Founded by Gabriel of Sedona and Niann Emerson Chase in 1989. Currently 105 adults and children. International members. Global change work for Destiny Reservists in Divine Administration. God-centered community based on teachings of *The URANTIA Book* and *Continuing Fifth Epochal Revelation The Cosmic Family Volumes* as received by Gabriel of Sedona. Organic gardens. Starseed Schools of Melchizedek, landscaping, Soulistic Medical Institute. Serious spiritual commitment required. POB 3946, Sedona, AZ 86340; 928-204-1206; info@aquarianconceptscommunity.org; www.aquarianconceptscommunity.org; www.globalchangemusic.org; www.musiciansthatneedtobeheardnetwork.org

**AQUARIUS COMMUNITY, Vail, Arizona.** Share picturesque mountain wilderness ranch blessed with ideal weather. \$150/mo. includes utilities. SASE. Box 69, Vail, AZ 85641-0069; jkubias@hotmail.com

**DANCING RABBIT, Rutledge, Missouri.** We are a growing ecovillage of more than 30 individuals of diverse ages and backgrounds, actively seeking new members to join us in creating a vibrant community on our 280 beautiful acres in rural northeast Missouri. Our goals are to live ecologically sustainable and socially rewarding lives, and to share the skills and ideas behind that lifestyle. We use solar and wind energy, earth-friendly building materials, and biofuels. We are especially interested in welcoming more women and families with children into our community. Help make our ecovillage grow! One-CM Dancing Rabbit Lane, Rutledge, MO 63563; 660-883-5511; dancingrabbit@ic.org; www.dancingrabbit.org

**EARTHAVEN ECOVILLAGE, Blue Ridge Mountains, North Carolina.** Earthaven is a multi-generational ecovillage on 320 forested

acres near Asheville, North Carolina. Dedicated to caring for people and the Earth, we come together to create—and to sustain beyond our lifetimes—a vital, diversified learning community. Our 60 members use permaculture design, build with clay and timber from the land, draw power from off-grid systems, drink and bathe in gravity-fed spring water, and use constructed wetlands for waste treatment. We raise children in Earthaven's nurturing village environment, and many of us work on the land in community-based businesses. We make medicines from wild plants, use consensus for decision making, and nourish our families with organic, local foods grown at Earthaven and in our bioregion. Our diets range from omnivore to vegetarian. We enjoy an abundant social and cultural life, and practice diverse spiritual paths. We offer workshops on permaculture design, natural building, herbal medicine, and other subjects. We're seeking new members of all ages and family situations, especially organic growers, people with home-steading or management skills, and skills in the trades. www.earthaven.org; info@earthven.org; 1025 Camp Elliott Rd, Black Mountain, NC 28711; 828-669-3937.

**ELDER FAMILY COMMUNITY, near Cherokee, North Carolina.** We are a small, growing family-of-choice looking for healthy, financially secure adults, mid-50s and 60s, who are retired or

REACH is our column for all your Classified needs. In addition to ads intended to help match people looking for communities with communities looking for people, Reach has ads for workshops, goods, services, books, products and personals of interest to people interested in Communities.

You may use the form on the last page of Reach to place an ad. **THE REACH DEADLINE FOR THE SUMMER 2006 ISSUE (OUT IN JULY) IS APRIL 30.**

The special Reach rate is only \$.25 per word (up to 100 words, \$.50 per word thereafter for all ads) so why not use this opportunity to network with others interested in community? We offer discounts for multiple insertions as well: \$.23 per word for two times and \$.20 per word for four times. If you are an FIC member, take off an additional five percent.

Please make check or money order payable to Communities, and send it, plus your ad copy, word count, number of insertions and category to: Patricia Greene, 381 Hewlett Rd, Hermon, NY 13652; phone 315-347-3070, email: patricia@ic.org (If you email an ad, please include your mailing address, phone number and be sure to send off the check at the same time.)

Intentional communities listing in the Reach section are invited to also visit our online Communities Directory at <http://directory.ic.org>. Listing on our web site is free and data from the site is used to produce our print version of the Communities Directory, with a new edition coming out annually. Contact: [directory@ic.org](mailto:directory@ic.org) or 540-894-5798 for more information on being listed in the Communities Directory.

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**Patricia Greene, 381 Hewlett Road, Hermon, NY 13652;**  
**315-347-3070 patricia@ic.org**

semi-retired, past child rearing, non-smokers, experienced with cooperative groups, easy to get along with, willing to take training in consensus and committed to mutual support, spiritual growth through relationships and living together as a loving extended family. We are looking to share ownership in an expanding project of eight acres and shared housing that includes both private and group space. We are near the Smoky Mountain National Park and are part of a larger mixed-age intentional community with community building, swimming pool and nature trails. Contact *Anthony or Ann at 828-497-7102 or email: annariel@dnet.net*

**ENOTA MOUNTAIN RETREAT, Hiwassee, Georgia.** Live, serve, play and experience the simple life in the beautiful north Georgia Mountains. We are seeking residents for our service-based spiritual, educational retreat center/campground/organic farm located on 60 magnificent acres with streams, waterfalls and ponds. Surrounded by 750,000 acres of National Forest. Our focus is sustainability and serving our guests. We have current need for construction, sales, accounting, front desk, farming, animal care, housekeeping, whatever is needed to operate the retreat center and farm. We offer clean air and water, housing, 2-3 home-cooked sit-down healthy meals together per day, stipend, free long distance, Internet access, free laundry and much more.

Come help us build a community and make a difference. [www.enota.org](http://www.enota.org) 706-896-9966.

**FELLOWSHIP COMMUNITY, Spring Valley, New York.** We seek co-workers. Located 30 minutes north of NYC, we are an intergenerational community founded in 1966, centered around the care of the elderly. Now numbering about 150 elderly, co-workers and children, we grow our own fruit and vegetables bio-dynamically. All ages work together in our practical work activities. They include a candle shop, metal shop, wood shop, weavery/handwork group, greenhouse, publishing press, bakery, outlet store and medical practice. The spiritual science (anthroposophy) of Rudolf Steiner is the basis for our work. There is a Waldorf School and several other anthroposophical initiatives nearby. Our lifestyle is an intense social/cultural commitment to the future of mankind. Check out our web site at [www.FellowshipCommunity.org](http://www.FellowshipCommunity.org). If you are interested in co-working or need additional info, please contact our office at 845-356-8494; or write to: *Ann Scharff, c/o The Executive Circle at 241 Hungry Hollow Rd, Spring Valley, NY 10977; rsffoffice@fellowshipcommunity.org*

**SANDHILL FARM, Rutledge, Missouri.** We are a small family of friends living together on an income-sharing organic farm. We value cooperation, raising children, living simply, caring for our land, growing most of our own food, working through our differences, making

good ecological choices, and having fun with our friends. We've been at this for 31 years and continue to grow in our visions and our capability to realize them. Sound like home? *POB 155, Rutledge, MI 63563; visitorscm@sandhillfarm.org; 660-883-5543; www.sandhillfarm.org*

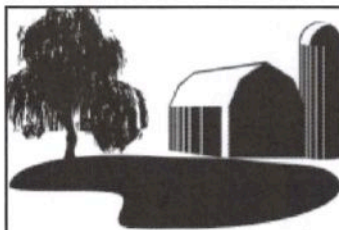
**TWIN OAKS, Louisa, Virginia.** Twin Oaks has been crafting culture and sustainable community for over 35 years. We are currently looking for new members, and would love to have you visit. Right now we would especially like more woman members. We can offer you: work in our community businesses, an abundance of homegrown organic food, a thriving social scene, and an established culture of non-violence, feminism and egalitarianism. You can offer us: your talents and skills (or your unskilled enthusiasm) and your desire to live an ecological and income-sharing lifestyle. For information: *Twin Oaks, 138-R Twin Oaks Rd, Louisa, VA 23093; 540-894-5126; twinoaks@ic.org; www.twinoaks.org*

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## COMMUNITIES FORMING AND REFORMING

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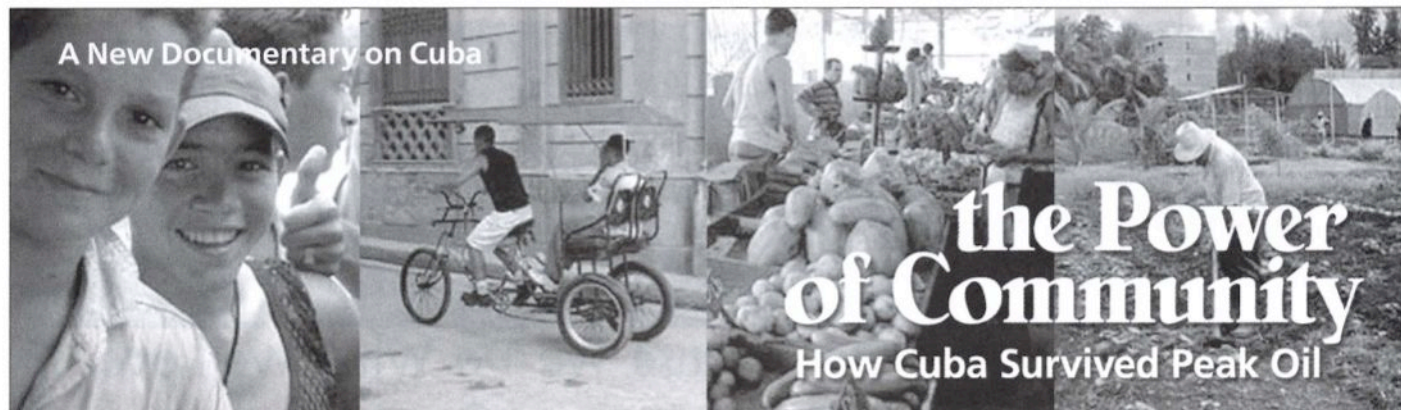


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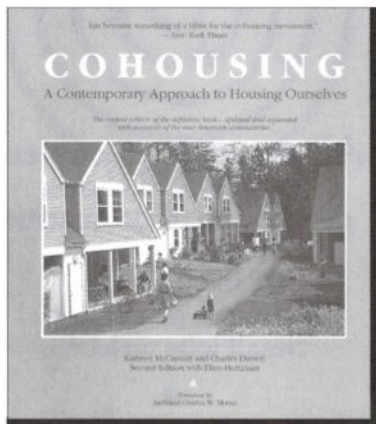


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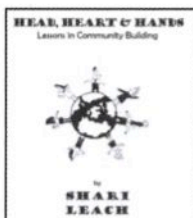
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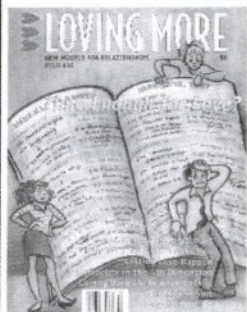
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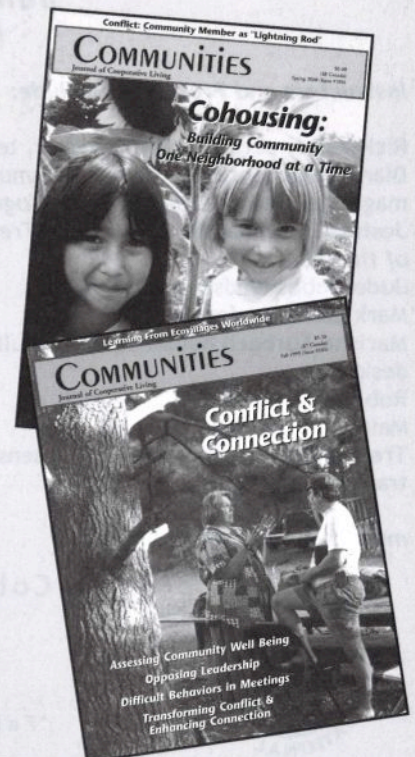
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## PERIPATETIC COMMUNITARIAN

(continued from p. 76)

Meanwhile, over in Pearlington, Mississippi, seven members of the Shannon Farm community comprised half of a construction crew coordinated by Building Goodness\*, another nonprofit financed through donations. Shannon's Marty Klaif reports that "It was significant that those who wanted to go on the trip were well-supported back home by community members who stayed behind. A father got childcare help so that his wife could go. A team of cooks provided meals for a woman with serious health issues so that her husband could go. Every person who went had a designated support person for their family back home, in case any assistance was needed. The community also made a substantial cash donation to Building Goodness so that additional crews could be sent down."

Both Klaif and Schweitzer report that the need, if anything, is worsening. Houses are still uninhabitable, and the relief resources are drying up. The Red Cross was there to deal with the immediate crisis, but is now pulling out. The small nonprofits are staying, and Schweitzer says that all kinds of volunteers are needed: cooks, massage therapists, laborers, organizers, builders, medical professionals, fund raisers, social workers—people who are hard workers, self starters, and able to maintain a positive attitude under sometimes harsh and stressful conditions. Volunteers also need to be self-sufficient, covering their own expenses (including travel, food, and health insurance) and providing most of their own building tools; cleaning supplies; chain saws; good masks, boots, and rubber gloves (for the mold); and any kind of vehicle, especially one set up for hauling.

These small nonprofits also make incredibly good use of their funding, stretching a nickel as far as it can go—so send a donation if you can. Plenty's annual budget, less than the Red Cross Director's annual salary, normally has only 11 percent overhead (including fundraising) and for Katrina relief it's more like 5 percent. That means that 95 cents of every dollar donated gets converted to direct aid. As Peter Schweitzer notes, "When you don't have

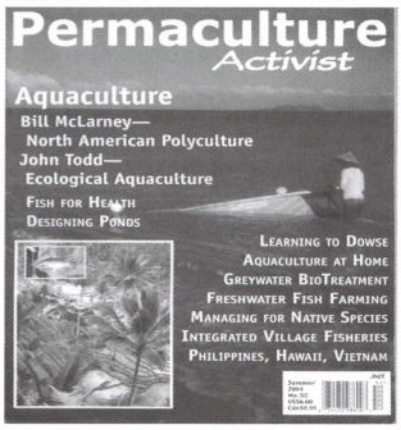
the big bucks, your wealth is in your friends and allies and in the great pure heart of the effort you are able to make together. While we mourn for the victims of natural and unnatural disasters and rail at the incompetence and corruption of governments and bureaucracies, we are made hopeful by the extraordinary outpouring of help by ordinary folks who get up and create miracles."

If you're one of those ordinary folks who wants to experience community and create miracles, check out the websites below and email [peter@plenty.org](mailto:peter@plenty.org). He'll help you find a place to plug in.

Plenty: [plenty.org](http://plenty.org); United Peace Relief: [www.unitedpeacerelief.org](http://www.unitedpeacerelief.org); Building Goodness: [www.buildinggoodness.org](http://www.buildinggoodness.org).

*Geoph Kozeny has lived in various kinds of communities for 32 years, and has been on the road for 18 years visiting communities—asking about their visions and realities, taking photos, and in general exploring what makes them tick.*

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## In the Wake of Katrina ... Intentional Community Members in Action

**W**ith the slow and much-criticized post-hurricane response of FEMA, the Red Cross, and other large organizations, it's inspiring to know that volunteers with intentional community experience are onsite with resources and know-how and are being effective.

I asked Peter Schweitzer, director of the nonprofit Plenty International\* based at The Farm community in Summertown, Tennessee, how it was that a small volunteer organization could be so effective while the big disaster-response organizations were faltering. His answer had three parts: (1) most of the community folks had extensive experience living with primitive conditions during the pioneering phase of their communities—so they know how to live with few amenities and how to make best use of scarce resources; (2) the teams of community volunteers are good at working autonomously as they coordinate cooperatively with their central organizing teams—whereas in the bureaucracies, the workers' hands are tied because everyone is waiting for someone else to give an order, while the people in suits fly in and out and are relatively out of touch with what's happening on the ground; and (3) the volunteers are good at getting along with the local folks from all different strata of society, especially the poor—as opposed to the “authority” and red tape the victims often face when dealing with the various government entities.

Schweitzer says that current and former members of The Farm have come together with other folks who know about community, forming an almost

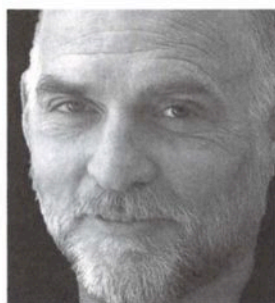
“instant community” near New Orleans, spanning all ages (teens to retirees) and many backgrounds. Additionally, Plenty has partnered with other volunteer groups—some established groups like Food Not Bombs, the Rainbow Family, and Veterans for Peace; plus new groups like United Peace Relief\* which is playing a major role in recruiting volunteers and coordinating with other relief organizations.

The volunteers are camping in tents, living hand-to-mouth, and sharing their very few resources. Showers are few and far between, and there seems to be an ongoing need to deal with donated vehicles breaking down. Folks have been really good at setting aside their own needs and really pitching in “for the cause,” and when they leave they tend to feel appreciated, thoroughly inspired, and often are eager to return.

Their community know-how includes:

How to pull together a team to unload a semi truck quickly, or knowing what to pack in a relief van for delivery in a remote neighborhood. Members of the Rainbow Family set up a big kitchen in a parking lot, with such good food and so well organized that they were able to feed hoards of volunteers plus many of the National Guard troops and Red Cross workers. Other Rainbow folks set up the Wall-Less-Mart in Waveland, Mississippi, a free store giving out kids' clothes, adult clothes, shoes, and many needed supplies. Much of the Plenty efforts went into building housing, distributing food and water where needed, and providing logistics support for the volunteer crews.

(continued on p. 75)

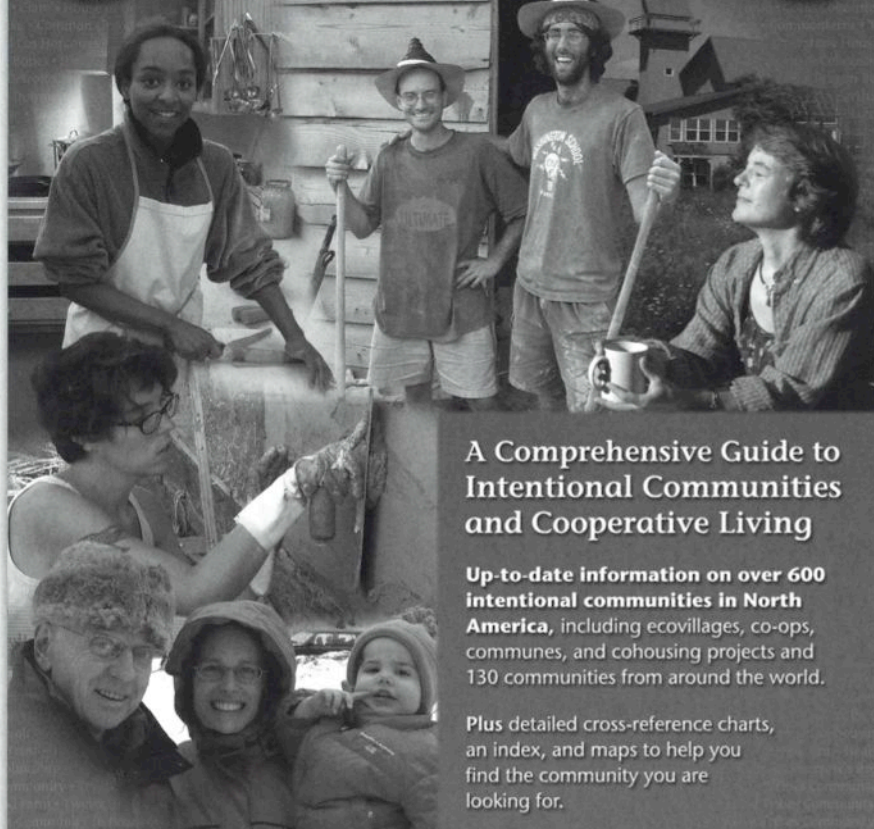


BY GEOPH KOZENY

**Community volunteers  
are good at getting  
along with the local  
folks from all different  
strata of society,  
especially the poor.**

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# COMMUNITIES



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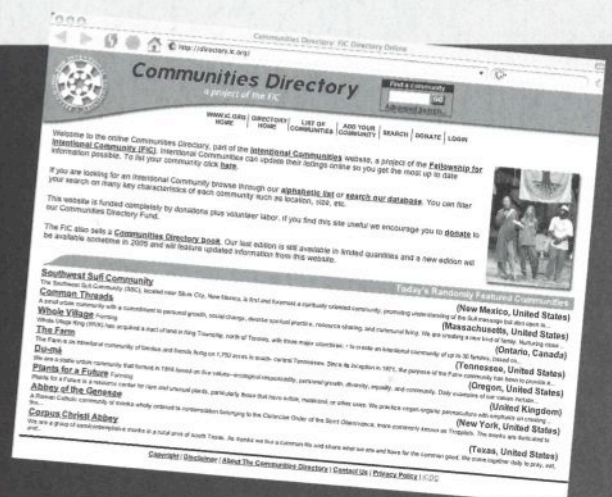
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**“I am reminded . . . of friends in several intentional communities and ecovillages worldwide who have . . . decided to pursue Powerdown and lifeboat-building strategies simultaneously. . . if there is a sane path from where we are to a truly sustainable future, these folks have surely found it.”**

**—Richard Heinberg**



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