

Newly-formed Sustainability Committee Brings Global Issues Closer to Home

by Marya Gendron, GRIP Special Projects Assistant

"I'm all about sustainability," a newcomer to the area said recently as he dropped by the GRIP office. An awareness of the need to live sustainably has become more widespread as looming resource shortages seem harder to ignore, and more mainstream as companies seek to incorporate environmental concerns into their marketing strategies. Many believe that the point in time when we will be forced to look at our short-sightedness and adapt to major energy and natural resource supply changes is not very far off. Several municipalities across the U.S. are already seeking to make choices more adaptable to this future uncertainty, including Yellow Springs, OH; Boulder, CO; and Willits, CA.

As William Joseph of the newly-formed Community Sustainability Steering Committee points out, sustainability is simply about living within our means. But very few cultural models and systems are in place that would indicate how to develop this sustain-"ability" on an individual, as well as a collective, scale. Joseph believes that the ease of the transition to living more sustainably hinges largely on making certain lifestyle and consumption choices even *before* we are forced to. What is needed to help that process along is a supportive organizational structure that can guide us to live in a way that is balanced, generative, and cooperative by providing information, tools, skills, and models. The recently-formed Community Sustainability Steering Committee seeks to do just that.

The group was formed following the success of a series of events on peak oil and sustainability. The Progressive Forum organized the first peak oil presentation in August 2005. Another larger event in December attracted 125 attendees and was sponsored by over 25 individuals, businesses and organizations in Grant County, including GRIP.

The committee's main goals are to support and collaborate with the many groups and individuals who would like to find ways to live more sustainably by providing tools and information on the topic. Marilyn Freeman, who recently moved to the area and became involved in the committee, says she also sees a need for a community calendar that would coordinate meetings and events of the many groups here that are focusing on different aspects of sustainability (see the inserted survey).

The committee, which meets monthly, has already hosted two successful events. In January of this year, Brandy McPherson of Vancouver Island, British Columbia shared some of the accomplishments of her community, O.U.R. Ecovillage, and the insights she's had after years of group visioning, decision-making, resource management, and energy-efficient building. The event, well-attended by over sixty people, ended in a lively question-and-answer period in which Brandy offered her perspectives on a wide range of topics, from ecologically-designed waste and gray water systems to how the community fostered the creation of a new zoning category. To read an interview with Brandy, visit our website at www.gilaresources.info.

The second event, a fundraiser for the locally-based Community Greenhouse Project, fulfilled another aim of the committee: to raise money to support local sustainability efforts, send representatives of the group to conferences on sustainability, and invite experts to the area. The event brought in over 85 people to watch "The Power of Community: How Cuba Survived Peak Oil," a film highlighting the many ways Cubans were affected by and adapted to the sudden oil shortage following the collapse of the USSR, the country's primary oil supplier, and the US embargo. The average Cuban lost 20 pounds in 4 years, and cases of malnutrition and anemia increased before a widespread organic agricultural movement flourished. One and a half million bikes were imported and 500,000 more manufactured, resulting in a society of more active, and therefore healthier, people. Today, 80% of Cuban produce is organic, 50% of urbanites consume food grown in their own urban gardens, and farming is one of the best-paid professions.

After the movie, participants enjoyed an organic Cuban meal, cooked by the Community Greenhouse Project with produce from their gardens. Breakout groups discussed ways in which the lessons learned in Cuba could be applied here. See www.gilaresources.info for a summary of their conclusions.

The Community Sustainability Steering Committee hopes to continue to host an event every six weeks. As part of the Gila River Festival, the group is sponsoring a talk by Brad Lancaster entitled "Turning Water Scarcity into Water Abundance: Guiding Principles to Welcome Rain into Your Life and Landscape", held on Sunday, May 14th, at the WNMU Global Resource Center Auditorium from 2-4pm. To find out more about this event, or to get involved in the Community Sustainability Steering Committee, contact William Joseph at (505) 313-1708, or call the GRIP office at (505) 538-8078.

RESOURCES:

OUR Ecovillage -

www.ourecovillage.org

For more details on Brandy McPherson's community in British Columbia.

Citizens Network for Sustainable Development -

www.citnet.org

Non-profit network bringing together US-based organizations, communities and individuals working on sustainable development issues in the U.S.

Sustainable Development Gateway -

<http://sdgateway.net>

Information from around the world on principles, policies and best practices of sustainable development.