



# CENTER FOR EARTH LEADERSHIP

Forging citizen leadership to a sustainable future |

2011 ANNUAL REPORT

## The Mosaic of Culture

**A**t the Center for Earth Leadership, we work to create a sustainable local culture from the ground up. The Mosaic of Culture illustrates how this works.

Each tile is an individual or a circle such as a neighborhood, workplace, school, faith center, living complex, or any other affinity group with a culture of its own. As the tiles move to a darker shade of green, the broader culture does as well.

In this report we describe the visible impact at the “tile” level. But first let us mention the societal benefits of this strategy to green the tiles of our community.

In the current economic and political climate, public policy and business leadership promoting sustainability have stalled. And individual citizens are discouraged and feel impotent in making a difference at the public policy level as they observe economic interests and political forces at work.

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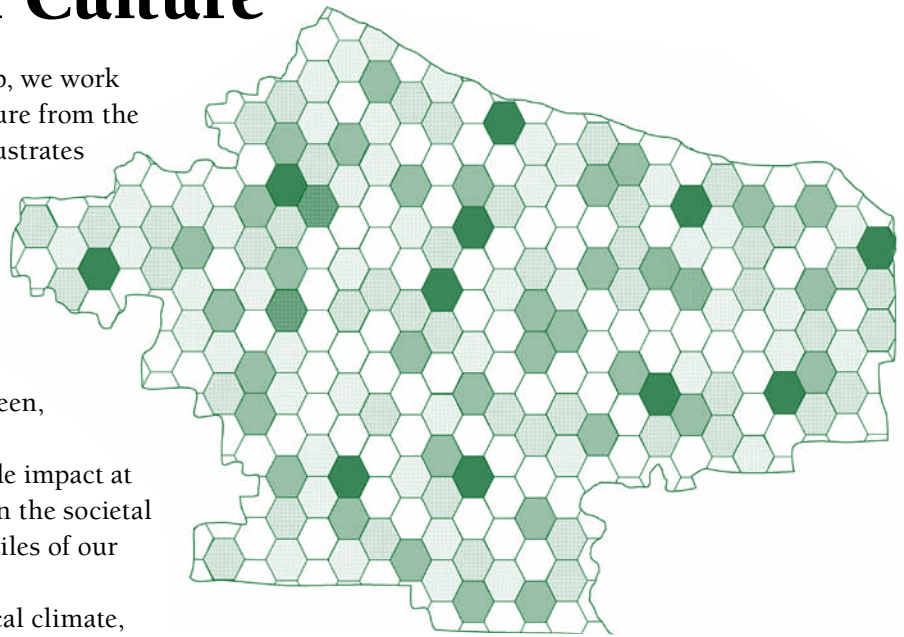
**“It will only be through a multitude of diverse, localized strategies. . . that we will come together to alter the course of the planet in the next 20 years.”**

– Steven Ames

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On the other hand, all of us have the ability to make a significant impact at the local level by assuming the intentional role of an agent of change within a circle of influence. In doing so, we take the mosaic tiles to a deeper shade of green.

This grassroots innovation actually spawns policy change as well. In the Portland area, we



*Greater Portland – Mosaic of Culture*

have witnessed this in many areas including green building, bicycle commuting, local food, and organic gardening, which now have city policies supporting them. And citizen innovation continues by those working on projects such as tool libraries, solarizing collectives, distributed energy, rainwater capture, and the use of gray water.

We are also mindful that grassroots innovation in Portland provides models and inspiration for citizens and communities across the country. If we relentlessly push the leading edge of grassroots change, we provide hope for those living in communities that have not yet embraced sustainability.

As co-founders, we are inspired by intentional citizens greening our local culture through their force of will—a revolution of sorts in the renewed spirit of citizen revolution occurring around the world.

– Jeanne and Dick Roy, Co-Founders

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# Agents of Change Green Circles of Influence

**Over 750** citizens have enrolled in our six-session course, “How to Be an Agent of Change in Your Circle of Influence.” There they develop a concrete plan and take first steps to move a chosen circle from Point A—the way it is today—to Point B—their vision for a more sustainable circle. Even where Point A already includes green practices, a deeper shade of green is always possible.

For **Megan Chandler**, Point B was a vision to move to zero waste at her workplace, PAE Engineers, which was already composting food scraps. After assessing trash being sent to the landfill, she set up bins for recyclables like plastics, batteries, and electronics. She then established purchasing guidelines to increase the number of products that can be reused, recycled, or composted. Megan even incorporated life-cycle cost analysis into the purchasing guidelines.



Ana and her Gladstone Street ivy pull

**Ana Inclan** had a vision that her Gladstone Street neighbors would work more closely together to improve the community. She invited two neighbors to help organize a neighborhood project to complete during the ten-day Village Building Convergence. To engage others, they knocked on doors, inviting everyone in a three-block area to a potluck. At the gathering, each person offered ideas about changes to improve the neighborhood. A planning group emerged and met weekly for three months. As their project, neighbors gathered each day to work on planter strips: replacing grass with natives and edibles and installing mosaic stepping stones to walk across. They also replaced a massive ivy patch at an apartment complex with strawberry and gooseberry plants. After laboring together, each evening they gathered for a potluck dinner hosted by one of the neighbors.

Last winter, **Jamie Repasky** and **Cindy Eldkrona** formed an EcoThink Club at Rieke Elementary for grades K-5, which met once a month for a wide



Eco-Thinkers examine “dead” nursery log.

range of activities. Conducting a waste audit in the cafeteria, the students were astounded to find 48 pounds of food waste for one lunch, including many whole apples. After two educational Waste-Free Wednesdays, the kids were able to reduce food waste by 33%. On a field trip to Tryon Creek Park to learn how the forest recycles, the children observed new plant life growing on decaying nurse logs. As a service project, the club collected 20 large bags of non-curbside plastics from the Rieke community.

At Duniway Elementary, **Katharina Steinmeyer** and her sustainability team made the strategic decision to hire AmeriCorps volunteer **Ben Morelli** for the 2010-11 school year. After enrolling in our Agent of Change class, Ben coordinated greening projects with significant impact. A courtyard de-paving project replaced asphalt with student-cultivated gardens full of vegetables and native plants. In the cafeteria, an innovative new system allows students to sort waste into different buckets, rinse and dry milk cartons for recycling, and carry fruit and veggie scraps out to the new three-bin composter.



Duniway student dumps food waste into bin for composting.

**Leslee Lewis** envisioned creating a sustainability committee for Overlook Neighborhood. Her

kickoff event, a soup potluck and viewing of *The Power of Community*, became a model for future gatherings. Six potluck/film nights have now been held. Leslee used Survey Monkey to poll neighbors about their concerns in the sustainability realm and put together a Web page. Last summer, the group held a neighborhood-wide yard sale/free share with contributions from over 50 households. This fall, it held a plastics and cork roundup.

**Albert Kaufman** had a clear Point B vision: a neighborhood garden in Northeast Portland. His first step was to recruit a group of 20 neighbors to prepare land leased by his housemate. After working with the team to remove a dying walnut tree, build a fence, and stake out plots, Albert organized a work party and barbecue for 50 people as his birthday celebration. A highpoint of the party was watching a machine blow rich soil into the garden area, creating a pile for each plot.



Neighbors prepare plots for garden.

## Center Supports Agents of Change

**After training** citizen agents of change, we support them in a variety of ways through our Agent of Change Network.

**Network gatherings and updates.** At regular Network gatherings, agents learn from and are inspired by experts and other class participants. At the fall 2011 gathering, Alison Dennis spoke about her experience in leading Burgerville, a Northwest business, to adopt more sustainable practices including the composting of food waste. Our bimonthly Agent Update provides a regular reinforcement of each person's role as a lifelong agent of change.

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**“Almost anything you do will seem insignificant, but it is very important that you do it.”**

– Mahatma Gandhi

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**Eco-School Network.** Because of intense interest among parents in being agents of change at school, we created our Eco-School Network, which now includes parents from 40 Portland-area schools who share information and inspire each other. At its second annual overnight retreat in October, the parents learned from experts how to work with volunteers, create earth-centered activities for student green teams, and organize a successful campaign. Our training of parents from nine of 13 Lake Oswego schools spawned the autonomous Lake Oswego Eco Schools Network. It works with the district as well as individual schools. In November, the Center organized an invitational meeting for parents from Beaverton schools to explore their involvement in the Eco-School Network.

**Learning from International Experts.** In 2011, the Center organized small-group sessions with three international experts for agents of change. In January Helena Norberg-Hodge, the producer of *The Economics of Happiness*, met with 35 agents of change for a potluck/conversation on the strategy of deep localization as a means to support local economy and preserve local culture. In the spring, Alan AtKisson, who was in Portland to give an Illahee lecture, trained 40 agents of change in a social change strategy called “innovation-diffusion theory.”

In September, **Betsy Taylor**, the founder of the Center for a New American Dream in Washington DC, visited Portland shortly after she, Bill McKibben, and Gus Speth (all national leaders in the sustainability movement) had been arrested in front of the White House while protesting the proposed Keystone XL pipeline. The pipeline would transport oil from the Alberta tar sands through the Midwest to Texas. (Critics warn that obtaining and using oil from tar sands has triple the global warming impact as drilling oil in the traditional way.) At a potluck hosted by the Center, Betsy described what prompted her to engage in civil disobedience for the first time in her life.



# Thank You Members and Donors

In 1992, 1,680 scientists (including 104 Nobel Prize laureates) called for a massive shift in culture in their now classic World Scientists' Warning to Humanity.

*A new ethic is required—a new attitude toward discharging our responsibility for ourselves and for the earth. This attitude must motivate a great movement, convincing reluctant leaders and reluctant governments and reluctant peoples themselves to effect the needed changes.*

Today, with the great movement underway, incremental change is sprouting up all about us. We see urban gardens, tool sharing libraries, elimination of disposable eating ware, de-paving projects, and the burgeoning interest in local investing.



Mess kit for Hayhurst School field trips



One of three Portland tool libraries

At the Center, we accelerate this shift, never satisfied with the rate of change, yet mindful that relentless incremental change is, in fact, transforming local culture and inspiring those in other regions to a higher level of engagement.

We thank our Center donors and members for the year ended June 30, 2011. Your generous support is an essential ingredient of the Center's work to create a truly sustainable culture.

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# Leadership through Lifestyle

**Lifestyle change** has an impact at multiple levels. For example, by switching from car to bicycle commuting, Wes reduces his personal carbon footprint. He becomes a role model for others. He contributes to a change in the culture of Portland. The change in culture impacts public policy makers and the business community. And the burgeoning use of bikes in Portland is a source of inspiration for other communities.

At the Center, we support lifestyle change through four discreet programs:

- **Home Eco-Parties** where a host invites a group of friends over for an evening to discuss eco-friendly practices. Prior to the party, each guest completes a personal checklist to provide a baseline for future change.
- **PowerPoint presentation** “The Path to Zero Waste” for brownbag lunches in workplaces.
- **Monthly Eco-Tips** used by business green teams for their members or for their workplace.
- **Fact Sheets** that synthesize the wealth of information available about green lifestyle practices on topics such as “Taking Green Steps at the Office.”

Among our trained Agents of Change, many are involved in innovative lifestyle changes in addition to as their work in moving a circle of influence along the path of sustainability.



“Used” dress draws rave reviews.

**Lane’ Bigsby** didn’t leave her sustainability values at the door when she planned her wedding this summer. Reversing the trend of extravagant weddings, her goal was to purchase nothing new and create no waste. A local designer made her dress from a vintage slip and fabric remnants including curtains. Lane’ made all the decorations from what she already had, borrowed, or bought second hand.

She gave homemade raspberry jam for favors. The food was potluck style, durable dishes were purchased from thrift stores,

and nearly no waste was landfilled. Decorations and tableware will go into a wedding goods library for other brides to use free of charge.

**David Ronen** has planted many food-producing trees and shrubs in his small suburban yard in Vancouver. He also has beehives and raised bed gardens, including two large *Hugelkultur* beds formed by sheet composting (rotting wood, leaves and



*Dwarf fruit tree for easy pickin’*

manure, and a top layer of compost). Each of his daughters, ages 8 and 12, has her own raised bed to grow food of her choice. David recently purchased dwarf fruit trees and blueberry bushes and offered some of them to neighbors, helping them plant, prune, and care for the trees.

**Terry Jones** has upgraded his home composting system so that he can compost all food waste—even meat and bones. From Agent and farmer **Scott Olson**, Terry purchased Bokashi buckets, which break down organic materials within a couple weeks and don’t attract rodents. For garden debris, he uses the common black plastic bins and a wire-mesh holding bin. In analyzing his energy use, Terry determined that from May to October about half of his electricity use was from air conditioning! He turned it off and purchased a fan to use during the few very hot days we have locally. More recently he sold his car. He either walks or rides his bike to the bus and borrows a pickup for special projects.

**Karen Brandenburger** keeps looking for ways she can live more sustainably. She attended a solar workshop a couple years ago and chose a contractor to install ten panels on her garage roof. Her average electric bill went from \$48 per month to \$10. Rebates and tax credits brought down the upfront cost so that her investment will be paid back in just three years. Karen hangs



laundry year-round in her garage, although in the winter she puts items in the drier for a short time before hanging. She eliminated meat from her diet primarily “because the resource use is appalling,” and she eats local, in-season, organic foods as much as possible, avoiding grapes from Chile and olive oil from Spain.

## Special Projects

**In addition** to ongoing regular programs, the Center creates projects with high potential as building blocks for a sustainable culture. Two examples illustrate our approach, one now at an early stage and the other quite mature.

**Localization initiative.** Economic globalization tends to create a monoculture of relatively passive “consumers” who purchase goods produced and sold by transnational corporations and their franchised outlets. McDonald’s in Baker City is much the same as in Beaverton, and neither reflects the unique culture of the place.

In contrast, the localization movement promotes unique, local living economies with the following characteristics:

- Dollars circulating through locally owned businesses, in contrast to dollars spent at transnational corporations and transported out of state to corporate headquarters.
- A strong sense of place and local community. For example, in Portland’s Hillsdale neighborhood, citizens have worked collectively to attract a new cooperative food store and farmers’ market where dollars circulate and provide community hubs that cannot be replicated by transnational corporations. Pursuing a bank-local strategy, Hillsdale neighbors are also exploring what would be required for a credit union to open a branch office in the neighborhood.
- Promoting self-sufficiency, such as growing and preserving food, storing rain water in cisterns, and sharing goods and services with neighbors.

To align with the movement, in January the Center kicked off a localization initiative by sponsoring a premiere showing of the documentary *The Economics of Happiness*. Buoyed by a crowd of about 900 citizens, the Center assumed a leadership role in convening

## Localization books

McKibbin, B., *Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future*

Chiras, D. & Wann, D., *Superbia: 31 Ways to Create Sustainable Neighborhoods*

Hopkins, R., *The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience*

James S. & Lahti T., *The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities and Towns Can Change to Sustainable Practices*

a group to consider options for a more robust buy-local campaign in Portland, which included representatives of the Center, the Sustainable Business Network of Portland, Supportland, and VOIS. Efforts are now underway to create a nonprofit home for a buy-local campaign.

## Oregon Lawyers for a Sustainable Future.

In 2006, the Center began Oregon Lawyers for a Sustainable Future. Although it began as a grassroots operation outside the Oregon State Bar (OSB), its goal was to weave the value of sustainability deeply into the fabric of the Oregon legal profession, including OSB.

In creating the new Sustainable Future Section (SFS), OSB took a significant pioneering step—the first bar section in the United States organized around a societal goal. In general, sections are organized around a body of substantive law, such as environmental law.

A sampling of topics for continuing legal education programs offered by SFS during its first two years provides a sense of the SFS’s role within the Bar:

- (1) How to create a steady state economy,
- (2) Debate: Should the Oregon Constitution be amended to protect the environmental rights of future generations?,
- (3) Valuing ecosystem services, and
- (4) The function of land trusts.

# Update on Earth Leadership Seminar

The Center's Earth Leadership Seminar was developed for targeted groups of about 12. Based on interest, plans are underway to offer the seminar more broadly in 2012.

**1. Four primary contexts.** The first session looks at four global influences that guide our future: (1) economic globalization, (2) electronic consumer culture, (3) advanced ecological degradation, and (4) energy and climate. In a float-trip analogy, although the river (primary contexts) is moving us toward the sea, we must understand it to navigate skillfully in the moment.



*Mealtime in electronic consumer culture*

**2. Societal response.** Since *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson was published in 1962, how has society responded to environmental degradation as we have moved from local issues like river clean-up to global issues like climate change and from localized economies to a global economy? What have we learned for the challenges ahead?

**3. Individual response.** Although the call has never been more compelling, most of us feel impediments to responding in a meaningful way to ecological degradation. To what extent are these impediments the result of our culture, our genetic make-up, or the existing structure of housing, transportation, food production, and other systems in our complex society?

**4. Going forth.** After exploring the world we live in, participants consider what a privilege it is to be living at this critical time and what an immense opportunity we have to make a difference through our actions. Although many feel oppressed by time, most of us have a great deal of discretionary time to devote to taking action beyond meeting essential obligations.

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