



CENTER FOR EARTH LEADERSHIP

Forging citizen leadership to a sustainable future | 2010 MIDYEAR REPORT

Hope for Our Future

Working locally in Oregon, we are continually uplifted by the intention and creativity of citizens working to create a sustainable culture. At the same time, while keeping an eye on major global contexts—the global economy, consumer culture, and advanced ecological degradation—we cannot avoid a steady stream of bad news.

In late May, we conducted a workshop on the “practice of hope” as a means to keep the window of hope always open. The alternative of hopelessness could well become a self-fulfilling prophesy. To explore hope, we put forth three principles that govern our work and daily lives.

Hope is our vision of the possible. In 1993, we began our full-time work as volunteers for the earth with the hope that a committed minority of citizens would lead the Northwest to a sustainable future. In doing so, we would provide a model for other regions.

This hope is about possibilities not probabilities. The importance of possibility is emphasized in *Man’s Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl. As a Jewish psychiatrist in a Nazi concentration camp, he observed the impact of the camp on fellow prisoners with no control over their destiny. Prisoners who held out hope for a possibility—to return one day to loved ones and meaningful work—fared relatively well compared to those who gave up.

Hope differs from optimism. Optimism and pessimism are transitory; they weave in and out of our lives based on news of the day. In contrast, a vision of the possible can be a stable, guiding force. Optimism and pessimism are both treated as distractions in our work to create a sustainable future.

Hope is like a road in the country; there was never a road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence. – LIN YUTANG

where things aren’t quite right with the boss, but not really understanding what is going on. After a candid conversation, even if it involves criticism, I have much firmer ground for my relationship as I move ahead.

Hope must be an intentional act. Because we cannot be certain of a positive outcome in the human quest to create a sustainable future, hope must be an intentional act. It is not something that happens to us; nor is it dictated by outside forces. Although we have no control over the ultimate outcome, we do have the power to remain hopeful and to align our conduct with our highest vision of the possible.

This is our hope for the future.



Caring for Earth

Madonna by Alice Rigan

Agent of Change Program

As cumulative enrollment in our Agent of Change course surpassed 500 this spring, we began to see a “tipping point” of sorts. Trained agents are bumping into each other and working together in some very interesting ways.

COMPOST CONNECTOR. When farmer Scott Olsen entered an Agent of Change class, the former software engineer was composting food scraps from a Bon Appétit-run café at Intel. Experimenting with an innovative composting method (bokashi), he was able to process a large quantity of food waste without expensive equipment. In his Agent class, Scott set a goal to reduce food waste to zero in the six cafes on the Hillsboro Intel campus. In the first six months, he has converted 38 tons of food scraps, mixing the finished compost into the soil on the Abundant Harvest CSA farm operated by agents Steve and Mish Radke. Inspired by his personal success, Scott is now a bokashi distributor for businesses and schools that generate food scraps and for farms that need compost. His shift from chips to scraps seems like a natural shift to us.



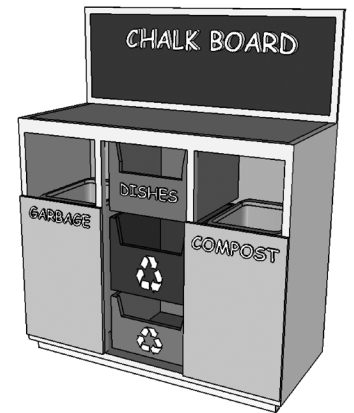
Food scraps from café to farm

TABOR COMMONS. Six years ago, when U.S. Marshalls seized the “Wake Up Deli” at southeast 57th and Division, a neighborhood activist hatched a plan to convert the building into a community center. Neighbors raised \$45,000 to purchase the property, and Tabor Commons was born. Agent John Shorb, an architect and resident of the Mt. Tabor area, provided pro bono design services, working with neighbors to conceptualize site improvements, renovation of the existing building, and construction of an activity building. Using sustainable practices, the pavement was torn up, and the building was gutted and reconstructed.

In the meantime, a single mother and her friends envisioned a Tabor Commons’ coffeehouse where caregivers and their children might gather. She formed the nonprofit Café au Play and secured a site in the Commons. Soon, agent Josh Lighthipe joined the board

of Café au Play. With sustainability in mind, he helped install bioswales on the property, is designing “material recovery stations,” and is looking into alternatives to disposables. To observe how this might be done, Josh visited agent Angel O’Brien at her Ladybug Organic Coffee shop in St. Johns. Through intention and innovation, Angel has reduced Ladybug garbage to less than ten pounds a week.

After a six-year effort, vision will become reality when Café au Play opens in July.



Material recovery station with chalkboard to display statistics

Perhaps the greatest contribution of the course is instilling the belief that everyone is a leader who can influence changes that promote sustainability.

COMMUNITY GARDENS. In Agent class #26 two participants chose their workplace as a site for a community garden. Megan Johnson, an employee of multi-state Kaiser Permanente, developed a lofty vision that one day community gardens would be common at Kaiser sites with the produce shared by employees and the local community.

As a first step, Megan secured approval from Kaiser management to create an organic garden on the Cascade Park campus in Washington. She then coordinated construction of 12 raised garden beds on a fenced-in plot. This spring, employees volunteered to plant vegetables. If this test site is successful, the company will consider locating garden plots on other campuses.



Raised garden beds at Kaiser in Vancouver

Also in Washington, agent **Jan Jewett** is developing a community garden at the Vancouver Unitarian Church. Working in partnership with an outside organization that secures garden plots for low-income families, Jan's design includes two adjacent gardens—one for low-income families and one for members of the congregation. In exchange for use of the site, the partner organization will install raised beds and mentor the new gardeners. To involve youth in the project, Jan also secured a team of students from Fort Vancouver High School's horticulture class to sheet mulch the beds in preparation for spring planting.

GROUP TOURS. In April, 12 agents of change toured of the Northeast Portland Tool Library on a field trip organized by co-director Jeanne Roy. Joining the group was change agent **Steve Couch** who told of his vision for a similar library within the SE Uplift Neighborhood Coalition where he is active. He had already located a space at St. David's Episcopal Church. A grant to SE Uplift covered the cost of promotional tools and supplies for renovating the space, and shelving material was donated by the ReBuilding Center.

Stories in the *Sellwood Bee* and *Southeast Examiner* attracted volunteers who developed a Web site and manned tables at the local farmers' market and other events. These outreach methods produced donated tools and money for the more expensive items. Steve then organized work parties to prepare the space, and on May 1 the Southeast Portland Tool Library opened for business.

Change agents ... identify opportunities for change and act on them—instead of just talking about it or waiting for someone else to take the lead.



Agents view tools for change at the tool library.



Through advertising and other communications, commercial interests seek to establish a direct, primary relationship with the child, and to relegate the parent to the role of financier and facilitator of transactions directed by the child.

—Gary Ruskin, Co-founder, *Commercial Alert*

Commercial-Free Childhood Initiative

Marketing to children is big business! Research has shown that child-targeted advertising adversely affects our children in many areas: family stress, obesity, eating disorders, premature sexuality, and violent behavior. As an antidote, the Center is conducting a Commercial-Free Childhood Initiative guided by a volunteer group of mental health professionals. They offer a 90-minute presentation to educators and parents. Groups can choose either an interactive PowerPoint presentation or a showing of the DVD *Consuming Kids*. Both options include a facilitated discussion to increase awareness and explore positive alternatives.

At a recent presentation for parents at Beaumont School, Key points included the following:

- The increased focus on younger children in sophisticated niche marketing strategies. The “tween” niche, which used to focus on children from 8 to 12 for advertising clothes, TV shows, etc, has been broadened to include kids from 4 to 12. Younger girls are sexualized in short skirts, make-up, and scanty shirts, and younger boys are presented as tough and violent.
- The increased use of young children to market products through strategies such as focus groups, and surreptitiously observing children in grocery stores and studying body language in response to products.
- A goal of creating super consumers: “It’s all about stuff, what you have, what you wear, how you look” not just for the typically sensitive adolescent age, but for younger children as well.

With all that sophisticated corporate targeting of children, what is the concerned parent to do? Counselors suggest that family time be balanced between simple “chill together” time and going places and spending money. Find time for service to others through nonprofit organizations or religious affiliations, and by all means, limit screen use for children. Remove screens from private bedrooms and check in those cell phones at night—too many of our kids are interfacing with an electronic device in the wee hours of the morning.

Center Briefs



NEW COURSE ON “ADVOCACY.” At the Center, we recognize four quadrants of citizen “earth leadership”: (1) paid work, (2) personal lifestyle, (3) agent of change within a circle of influence,

and (4) advocate in the outer world. The Center is now developing a quadrant-four course on advocacy. Session topics under very early consideration include coalition building, advocacy as a purchaser, lobbying, media strategies, visual messages, electronic advocacy, and street theater.

ECO-SCHOOL NETWORK ON THE MOVE. In January, the Center’s Eco-School Network hosted an informational meeting for parents and educators interested in promoting sustainability at school. From the group of about 40 guests, 25 enrolled in our winter/spring Agent of Change classes and are now being integrated in the ongoing Network.

A number of Network parents are focused on cafeteria waste in their schools—styrofoam trays, disposable utensils, food scraps, and milk cartons. They envision washable eating ware and recycling or composting cafeteria waste. However, stumbling

blocks have been ever present, such as how to organize a volunteer group committed to washing trays. To address these issues, a subgroup of eight Network members formed to assist Portland Public Schools in efforts to meet guidelines that call for waste prevention and food composting. Recently, the group heard good news: At the insistence of Network parents, Portland Public Schools is eliminating styrofoam trays in grade schools. The district has budgeted money for labor to wash durable trays, and the City of Portland will provide one-time funds for purchasing the trays.

In the meantime, the Lake Oswego Eco Schools Network is urging its school board to develop a formal sustainability plan and to help find ways to connect the plan to classroom curriculum.

DESIGN PROFESSIONALS ARE RECEPTIVE. Most design professionals, such as architects, understand sustainability at a deep level as they become experts in green building practices. With that background, over 45 architects and other design professionals have enrolled in the Center’s Agent of Change class. Although agent class projects do not often involve green building design, the pre-existing understanding of sustainable building practices is very powerful as they go through the Agent course.

Printed on 100% post-consumer recycled paper

2010 Mid-Year Report

Nonprofit Org.
US Postage
PAID
Portland, OR
Permit No. 3891

319 SW Washington
Suite 400
Portland, OR 97204
(503) 227-2315
info@earthleaders.org
www.earthleaders.org

