

OTHER

## WASTE NOT



PDI'S MELISSA McDONALD &amp; NATE DOWNEY

There's more to permaculture than xeriscaping.

BY JULIA GOLDBERG

PERMACULTURE  
DESIGN COURSE

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In his non-fiction book "The Log from the Sea of Cortez," John Steinbeck looks at the stars, ponders the interconnectedness of life and speculates that either everything matters or nothing does. In Santa Fe, a growing number of people are studying the fundamental connections between all living things. Steinbeck called this philosophy *teleology*. In Santa Fe, the word in frequent use is *permaculture*.

Michael Kramer, executive director of the Permaculture Drylands Institute, says that though some people think permaculture refers only to landscaping practices such as xeriscaping, permaculture actually is an encompassing philosophy. "Permaculture deals with economic development, community development, politics, interpersonal skills, green building, not just native species and water conservation," Kramer says.

This year, PDI celebrates 10 years of spreading the permaculture gospel to more than 3,500 people, and kicks off four weekends of permaculture courses starting this Saturday. PDI also publishes a quarterly journal for members and teach-

es permaculture classes at both Native American Preparatory School and Desert Academy.

Through PDI, people learn the basic ethics and ideas behind permaculture, which is based on recycling energy as many times as possible within a given system, be that the land or the economy. Permaculture incorporates the notion that solutions usually are found in the problem itself, with a constant eye towards creating systems without waste.

Nate Downey, one of PDI's instructors and co-owner of Santa Fe Permaculture, says he became interested in permaculture after working with a group focused on sustainable communities. "I realized that our goal was to build sustainable communities in northern New Mexico, but none of us was versed in permaculture," says Downey. Although Downey's business, Santa Fe Permaculture, deals mostly with landscaping issues such as rainwater harvesting and erosion control in desert conditions, Downey says the principles of permaculture "can be applied whether you're on the Equator or in Alaska."

With the growing interest and success of PDI, other permaculture projects are in the offing. Under discussion is a permaculture credit union that would allow people financing options for non-traditional, ecologically friendly purchases. "One thing we promote is local control over investment," Kramer says. "If you want to build a straw bale house and get a loan from NationsBank, it could be very difficult. But it will be something that permaculture people are very much aware of."

Although PDI has taught throughout the state, Santa Fe in particular has responded strongly. Kramer points out that even the City of Santa Fe is beginning to use the word permaculture in its request for proposals for public works projects. For Kramer, who founded the Youth Ecology Corps in 1991 and specializes in environmental education, the opportunities to teach others continue to grow — Mayor Larry Delgado recently named him to the city's first Sustainable Community committee. "Permaculture used to be an unknown word," Kramer says. "Now people throw it around, and they really are starting to know what it means."