

Greenhouse bust backfires on cops, us

It was a typically permacultural day at Camino de Paz School and Farm. The students had tended the chickens, goats, sheep, and horses. They'd weeded and watered vegetable beds, picked fruit, made cheese, canned tomatoes. They'd taken math, English, Spanish, and history. Two students, Sasha and Sarah, prepared campus-grown potatoes, cheese, applesauce, and a medley of fresh greens. Under the shade of an old apricot, Ben and Reyes set 25 places for lunch.

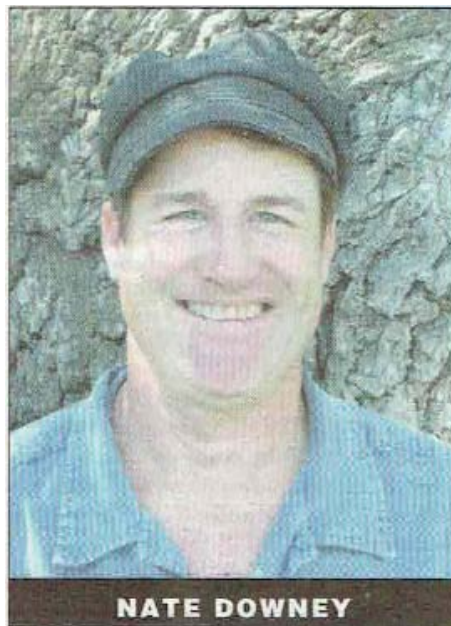
It was a normal day at Camino de Paz, until our tax dollars showed up. By "tax dollars," I'm not talking about some long-awaited grant or rebate — sustainability-based education isn't subsidized like big banks and oil conglomerates. Instead, our tax dollars flew in by means of a U.S. Army helicopter, four entrance-blocking vehicles, and various "personnel" donning guns, ammo, bulletproof vests, and at least a little attitude.

"Did you know we're open to the public?" school director Patricia Pantano asked a DEA agent who claimed possession of a search warrant. "With these 11-year olds here, do you think this demonstration of force is appropriate?"

"What?" countered a state trooper, "Are your kids afraid of cops?"

Afraid? Nah. Cops, drug agents, soldiers, SUVs, and helicopters in attack mode. Fortunately, kids these days can't avoid a hefty dose of ludicrous violence on big screens, TVs, and telephones. There's not a true American kid who wouldn't love to be raided by special ops, especially if it cuts into music class.

But whether or not kids are uncomfortable is of much less importance than whether or not adults express their anger in a loud and constructive manner. As much as I deeply appreciate the need for police, as citizens it is our duty to question authority in situations like these, and the easiest way to do this is with financial accounting.



On the expense side, you have one gas-guzzling helicopter, four environmentally unfriendly vehicles, endless on-site and off-site personnel (of at least four government agencies, including the judge and the staff of the judge who signed the warrant), countless drug-war trainings, numerous expensive technological gadgets, plenty of guns, ammo, and protective gear, and a requisite number of reports and other paperwork.

For what? They were hoping to find a large amount of marijuana growing in the school's greenhouses. What they actually produced — heirloom tomatoes — has become an embarrassing and distracting public-relations nightmare, a problem that could have been avoided given five minutes of web surfing. In a democracy, even the "What-were-they-smoking?" mistakes of the police and the military are also the mistakes of those who relinquish power to the lawmakers, judges, and executives who manage law enforcement and our armed forces.

Has the prohibition of marijuana in our fast-food culture come to this? That probable cause includes the possession of a greenhouse? In permaculture, we say "the problem is the solution." In this economy, it's a big problem to be wasting resources on such a gratuitous war on a weed. The solution simply depends on when will we grow up and admit this.

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