

# 'Gather your people and plant the fields'

Late last summer, like a lonely wildflower in an uninviting landscape, Occupy Wall Street sprouted unexpectedly on the 224th birthday of our constitution. Germinating in a community space along Liberty Street, the protest quickly grew huge and flowered prolifically. From sea to shining sea and beyond, scores of second-generation occupations appeared, and a worldwide progressive-populist revolution began.

Just how far the movement will go is unknown, but already its effects are clear. Thanks to newfound grassroots enthusiasm, the Keystone Pipeline and Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) have been thwarted; petitioners who would like to oust Scott Walker, the anti-labor governor of Wisconsin, showed up with over one million signatures; ground is gaining in the move to amend the Supreme Court's Kafkaesque decision that defined corporations as persons, and a peacenik is campaigning hard to lead the GOP.

The political landscape seems much

more open to positive political change than at any time in my adult life, but how will this energy be taken to the next level? The notion of an "occupation," or any political protest, is always a catalyst for potential change that may or may not amount to much over time.

The key to long-term success in endeavors to replace a dominant paradigm is collaboration among those doing the replacing, so it's apropos that the theme for the Xeriscape Council of New Mexico's next conference and expo is "Collaborations for New Solutions." According to the group's promotional materials, the theme for the Albuquerque conference on Feb. 23-24 and its expo on Feb. 25 "looks for ways that people with overlapping interests might team up to solve mounting economic and ecological problems."

For well over a decade the council has made its conferences about much more than gravel, weed barrier, cacti, and chamisa. You can always get a

phenomenal amount of information about how to garden with very little water, but you can also always get inspired to do amazing work for the planet and her people - just by attending, listening, making connections, and dreaming up ways to collaborate.

One speaker to catch for the motivational quality of his message and the practical information he'll share is Miguel Santistevan. He'll be speaking during the first day of the conference which will be held at Albuquerque's Crowne Plaza Hotel (that tall building on the northeast corner of the I-25 and I-40 intersection). So critical is Miguel's message that I reserved the last interview of my book *Harvest the Rain* for him. Here's how he summed up our situation:

"You know, everybody is running around worried about the future and wondering what could possibly be the fate of the human race. But I learned something long ago from a respected elder. 'Don't over analyze the problem,' he



NATE DOWNEY

said. "The solution is simple. Gather your people and plant the fields."

So in 2012, let's do more than just protest. Let's gather, collaborate, and sow seeds for a sustainable future.

*Nate Downey is president of the ecological landscaping firm, Santa Fe Permaculture (505-424-4444), and the author of Harvest the Rain (Sunstone Press, 2011). Nate will be speaking on Friday morning of the conference and at the free expo on Saturday. On-line registration and more info about the conference and expo can be found at [www.xeriscapenm.com](http://www.xeriscapenm.com).*