

St. Michael's Drive wants you!

In an average year on a stretch of St. Michael's Drive between St. Francis Drive and Cerrillos Road, seven million gallons of storm water could, in theory, be harvested from the thoroughfare's blacktop, sidewalks, and denuded median strips. Capture runoff from the roofs and parking lots of nearby businesses, collect all accessible side-street drainage, and, voila, the area could provide 50 million gallons of water annually.

That's a great resource, but it's only the beginning. Fortunately, a growing local movement sees all manner of potential for St. Michael's Drive, and these folks want to bring you on board. Part festival, part brainstorming session, "RE:MIKE," as its founders have named it, will feature "music, food, exhibits, tours, lectures, participatory activities, demonstrations, and art installations," according to Ben Haggard, a principal at Regenesis.

From the evening of Friday, Sept. 20, through the afternoon of Sunday, Sept. 22, RE:MIKE will sprout up in the Saint

Michael's Village parking lot. The "village" hosts some vibrant local businesses like Rob and Charlie's, Annapurna's, and the Green Owl Coffee Café (which in February replaced an insipid gas station and convenience store). The strip mall is also the site of a Ben Franklin's that closed back during Sam Pick's mayoralty, and it appears that a spooky-small number of human beings have been in there ever since.

In addition to focusing on water issues, part of the coalition will be concentrating on pedestrian- and bike-friendly transportation. Others will spotlight alternative energy. Another group will be keyed into improving aesthetics throughout the St. Michael's Drive corridor. A fifth committee's goal is to inspire and promote local entrepreneurs.

"The idea came out of a confluence of interests on the part of Mix, the Story of Place Institute, the Santa Fe Art Institute, and various professional planners," Haggard, who is also a permaculture designer

and teacher, told me recently as we gazed into his luscious backyard garden. "We realized there was growing momentum for revitalizing St. Michael's and that it would be a shame if that effort failed to help integrate and strengthen the community of Santa Fe.

"Twenty years from now I see St. Mike's as an innovation zone that offers the space and resources to support the needs and entrepreneurial spirit of Santa Fe's young people. I see it as a potentially powerful tool for reversing the brain and energy drain that has plagued Santa Fe for decades, and I see it as a major laboratory for ecological urban design."

The event later this month should be fun and interesting for anyone who wants to make this city even finer. Many of the activities are designed to be participatory, and all are supposed to encourage out-of-the-box thinking. What would you do with 50 million gallons of water? A little shade would be nice. How about an archipelago of community gardens?



NATE DOWNEY

At the geographical center of the City of Santa Fe at a time when your home town seems to need it most, a heart has begun to beat just down the street from you. Come, and be part of the solution.

Author of Harvest the Rain (Sunstone Press, 2010), Nate Downey started Santa Fe Permaculture in 1992. He is also the proud spouse of licensed landscape architect, Melissa McDonald, who co-owns both Santa Fe Permaculture, Inc. and PermaDesign, Inc.