

Permaculture in Practice

Happy B'day, Santa Fe Permaculture!

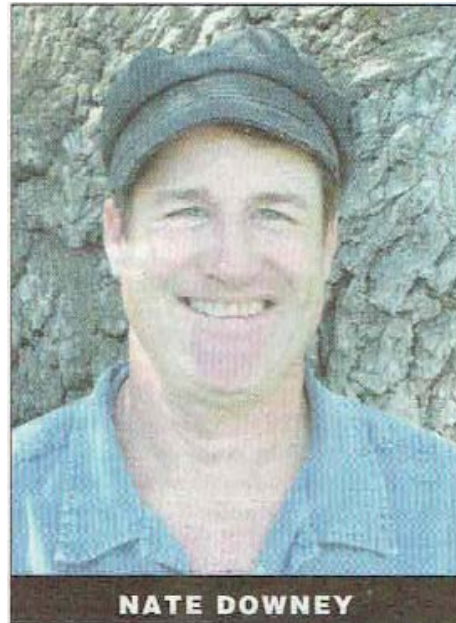
Santa Fe Permaculture (SFP) turns 20 this spring. Part of the festivities include my talk at the next Green Drinks. Sponsored by the New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce, the recently renewed monthly event is a chance for people who care about the planet to network, socialize, eat, and, well, drink. Please join us from 5:30 to 7 p.m. at Sweetwater Harvest Kitchen, 1512 Pacheco Street.

No stranger to the Red Wine Ranger, I'm from a typical Irish Catholic family that pretty much imbibes all manners of alcohol, sings, and talks politics. Though I still pontificate like a butterfly and sing like a bumbling lunatic, I don't drink much anymore.

It's odd. When close family and friends realize the fact of my relative sobriety, I sometimes see horrifying questions dart between their eyes. "Did he hurt anybody?" "Did he total his truck?" Or from deep within an age-old physiognomy, they ask themselves, "Did he get time?"

Luckily, nothing dramatic like that occurred in my accidental disinterest in alcohol. It all started when I was innocently beginning my first book, *Roof-Reliant Landscaping*. Since the State of New Mexico was paying for it, the manuscript had to be an essentially humorless text. I soon realized that the best time to write a book is after dinner and before breakfast, so the obvious problem for the green drinker in me was that I had no talent for writing an essentially humorless textbook with a post-dinner buzz or a pre-breakfast hangover.

Fortunately for Green Drinks, the New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce, and the owners of my Sweetwater-wine-bar soapbox, I plan to focus on none of this teetotalism. Instead, I'll describe how over the last 20 years SFP has applied permaculture principles. We're calling the talk "Marketing Lessons from Nature," because I do think there is a great deal to be gained by learning about how nature works. After all, she's become pretty productive over the last 6 billion years here on planet Earth.



In *Permaculture: A Designers' Manual*, Bill Mollison nails it: "Cooperation, not competition, is the very basis of future survival and of existing life systems." I like to say that cooperation is the driving force of nature. Of course, one can argue that capitalism is not "natural," but, either way, people in business can still learn from nature and reap meaningful benefits.

We tend to think that competitive excellence causes success, and there is much truth to the positive side of healthy competition. But successful business people are also great cooperators. You have to be when it comes to partners, customers, suppliers, subcontractors, and all of the other nodes of business from marketing to sales to production, distribution, and all the way to collections.

I'm no expert on modern economic theory, but if cooperation's potential as a force in the economy isn't the most overlooked fact of modern economics, I'd like to know what is.

*Nate Downey is the author of *Harvest the Rain* (Sunstone Press, 2010) and the president of Santa Fe Permaculture, Inc. You can contact him through his new company website, www.permadesign.com.*