

PERMACULTURE IN PRACTICE

Local eco-powers -- activate

Nate Downey/For The New Mexican Sep 3, 2017 (0)



Conference season is upon us. And this is an autumn of rich content.

If you can possibly get to the far side of the Golden Gate Bridge, I recommend the mother of all eco-conferences, Bioneers (Oct. 20-22). Santa Feans Nina Simons and Kenny Ausubel started Bioneers on the St. John's College campus 28 years ago, and growth came fast. Their headquarters remain on the second floor of the Santa Fe Farmers Market building, so you get to support a local business in an ironic — yet inspiring — twist that includes getting out of Dodge.

Events abound closer to home, too. Another seasoned symposium that started in Santa Fe is the Quivira Coalition's annual feed-the-world-with-responsible-restoration-techniques-while-thinking-outside-the-box festival. I remember the first one, featuring poet Wendell Berry, in the old Firestone Building on Guadalupe and Alameda. This popular annual event had to move to Albuquerque almost immediately because ranching and ecology *can* work together in cooperation. If you're not clear on this, you probably haven't been to a Quivira conference. The next one starts on the Ides of November.

New to the eco-conference table is Reconnect Today, a fledgling nonprofit with a mission "to support initiatives that reconnect us to ourselves, to each other, and to the community around us." But don't think it's just a load of Santa Fe woo-woo. It's real.

Speakers include powerful, socio-ecological thinkers like Winona LaDuke, Judy Wicks, and Charles Eisenstein. Topics will range from water, food, and jobs to public banking, bioregional manufacturing, and alternative economics. "At a time when things are really insecure in the world," the group's executive director, Melissa Pickett, told me during her family's road-trip toward totality, "we want to help connect people locally in the context of some pretty profound national, international, and indigenous perspectives."

Opt in and you'll get to connect with locals juggling solutions on the ground. I'll be on a panel with aquaponics master R. Charlie Shultz, HOPE director Marian Naranjo, and philosopher-farmer Don Bustos. Localization guru Vicki Pozzenbon is moderating a couple of panels, and public-bank advocate Elaine Sullivan will be there in full force. Former gubernatorial candidate Alan Webber, Tesuque Pueblo's seed-saver extraordinaire Emigdio Ballon, Retake Our Democracy's Paul Gibson, biofuels expert Luke Spangenberg, Nicholas Mang from the Story of Place, and many other local luminaries are all part of the action.

Reconnect Today is working in collaboration with Local Futures, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit with strong ties to the permaculture community. ("Local Futures" is the new name for the four-decades-old International Society for Ecology and Culture). Among many other good works, the organization has a long history of producing successful conferences around the world. In fact, don't be surprised if the Kingdom of Bhutan sends a high-up representative to boast about his country's happiness quotient. After all, the theme of this conference is "The Economics of Happiness," which is borrowed from a Local Futures-sponsored documentary by the same name. Details about this youth friendly event (Oct. 12-14) at the James A. Little Theater are at www.reconnect-today.org.

*Nate Downey, the author of Harvest the Rain and Roof-Reliant Landscaping, has been writing this column since 1999. He started his local landscape-contracting business, Santa Fe Permaculture, in 1993 and PermaDesign, a landscape-architecture firm, in 2010. Please join him at **Collected Works Bookstore on October 8 at 11 a.m. for a Journey Santa Fe event** intended, in part, to preview the Economics of Happiness conference.*

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