



COMMUNITY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

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**CONFERENCE BROCHURE
INCLUDED**



Editor's Notes: Finding Place

This issue includes articles by Bill Vitek and Stephanie Mills, presenters at our fall conference. Both Bill and Stephanie explore the role of land in the places they have chosen to make home. Stephanie examines the ways rootedness within a human community and the land can be the context of our lives. Bill suggests that there is also a sense of place in the urban environment and points out some ways to nurture that. In our third article, Jim Sullivan offers a different viewpoint on our country's monoculture. The focus on place arose from the choice of our conference topic: *Nurturing a Sense of Place*. I'm not sure the conference planning committee was aware of the journey it was embarking upon when it chose this topic. I know I wasn't prepared for how an investigation into place would become part of my life direction.

I first became aware of the importance of place when I fell in love with Yellow Springs, the community in which I have lived for the past twenty six years. It happened even before I moved here, when my husband and I were graduate students in Nashville, Tennessee. He would sometimes bring copies of the weekly Yellow Springs News back from his research trips to the Antiochiana collection at Antioch College. It seemed as if Yellow Springs was calling me home. My first weeks here in 1972 were spent walking around in love with the place. When I have been at a crossroads, contemplating moving because of career, education or relationship possibilities, this place has always won out. Yet it wasn't until we chose *Nurturing A Sense of Place* as our conference topic that I began to analyze what "place" means.

As committee members began to discuss the meaning of place, sense of place and nurturing a sense of place we discovered we each had a different idea. How odd it was to be planning a conference about something the meaning of which we were unsure. In hindsight I see why we were confused. Essentially, our culture is clueless about place, its significance and importance. That is precisely why our investigation is so important. Our lack of understanding is fundamentally related to how we have been treating the earth and creation.

I began my inquiry into place by developing a reading list (which will be available at the conference). Some of my first reading – an article by Louise Erdrich and a book by Barry Lopez – opened me to the Native American experience of place and the significance of the land in their culture. For the first time really, I had a glimpse of what it must be like to lose one's place when the land is literally part of who one is. I have continued my reading on various perspectives of place and nurturing a sense of place including sacred place, urban spaces, African-American heritage preservation work, regenerative design, ecological restoration, and community and place. A deepening understanding of place is a bittersweet thing. I have come to an earth-centered spirituality, much more present to the beauty and awe of creation and much more saddened by its destruction. In Joanna Macy's book *Despair and Personal Power in the Nuclear Age* (1983) she explains how and why empowerment comes from a collective admission of despair. We are facing that situation today with relationship to our environment. Gatherings like our conference offer the opportunity to be empowered to do the creative and restorative work which calls us.

Community Service News

by Marianne MacQueen

We have been busy with our second phase of remodeling, local projects and conference planning. Just as we were wondering how we would do it all Sarah Eastman – granddaughter of Billie and Dick and daughter of David Eastman – inquired about internship opportunities and we grabbed her. She is helping us convert the “vault room” into an office which we are calling Sarah’s Office in her honor.

Our work on revitalizing the library has resulted in boxes containing a twenty year collection of alternative magazines which needs a new home. We don’t have the space to archive this collection. If you have ideas on a good home for these magazines please let us know.

We want to hear from you!

What do you like about the Newsletter?

What would you like to see added or changed?

The Newsletter is undergoing a redesign process to be completed by the beginning of next year which will also include a name change. We welcome and need your feedback.

We are working on two local projects. After assisting Community Service members Cindi and Bob Renn in hosting a presentation on cohousing in Yellow Springs in May, we are now working with a group which would like to build a cohousing development in the Yellow Springs area. The group is looking for more members, so call us if you are interested. For

several months we have been meeting with a small group of local folk for the purpose of developing a dialogue about community visioning and sustainability in Yellow Springs. We will share more about that as it develops. Lastly, an ad hoc group of Community Service Board members met to affirm our support for land trusts and to look for ways to enhance that support. The group decided to develop a land trust resource kit to be available at minimal cost. If you have information that you think would be important or know of other sources of information please let us know.

In community building we are, of course, much more effective when we join with others. Toward that end Community Service has recently become a member of the *Bioregional Association of the Northern Americas* (BANA) and the *Land Trust Alliance*. The Land Trust Alliance supports and promotes land trusts in a variety of ways including education, lobbying, information exchange, and hosting a conference. I will be attending the BANA meeting at Sunrock Farm outside of Cincinnati on August 28-30.

During the last couple of months Board members and I have attended several excellent conferences in Ohio: the *Earth Literacy Conference* in Athens in April with Sr. Miriam MacGillis; *Rebuilding our Communities: Strategies from the Grassroots* at Oberlin College during the same weekend; *Think Locally* sponsored by the Olney Friends School and the Center for Plain Living in May (where I first met Stephanie Mills); and *The Earth Spirit Rising Conference* sponsored by IMAGO in Cincinnati in May and attended by almost 500 people. At all these gathering we’ve made new connections while renewing old ones and have discovered a wealth of activity and concern for issues of sustainability, community and spirituality.

The Journey Home

By Stephanie Mills

Some people have talent for making themselves at home anywhere. The wanderers among us are like creatures of the air, naturally born to a life that isn't constrained by geography. More of us require familiar territory. Perhaps this kind of attachment to place is the product of humanity's long history of hunting and foraging, tilling the soil, and living or dying according to one's knowledge of place. For most of human experience, thriving has required a fine attention to the land's life.

Our rootedness has been steadily undermined by the advance of civilization, with the pace accelerating wildly during the fossil-fuels episode. Whether they possess the desire or ability to settle in just any place, human beings are now set in motion about the planet like birds driven before a great wind. Some see jobs, some "quality of life" in as-yet-unspoiled environments. The frontier mentality, the hope that things will improve in the next territory, also works against rootedness. In a world beglamoured by mass media, Dallas or Beverly Hills may become a life's ambition. Place, we fancy, can be a matter of design.

In his recent book, *The Media Lab*, Stewart Brand remarks that e-mail has destroyed the "tyranny of place" – an arresting phrase that contains a grain of truth. Like any great teacher, one's place can seem to be a tyrant. Until we slip the toils of flesh, we are ruled by our need to eat and breathe and drink and see, and for these we need homes with fertile soils, flowing waters, and leaves trafficking in sunlight and air. We need nature's sound and motion to

evoke our intelligence. These are real constraints, and the more our minds are entranced by getaway fantasies, fixated on big ideas, the more onerous the disciplines of place do seem.

Some claim that communities exist in computer networks. Hence these networks, devotees say, qualify as places, or "virtual" communities. Yet they entail few obligations and harbor no nesting birds or healing herbs. Their intelligence is spread very thin.

Genuine community requires that I deal with a mix of people, including some who at first blush are scary and incomprehensible, folks who don't seem to share any of my tastes, values, or concerns. What we do share is the fact of living in a certain place – Kasson Township, Leelenau County, Michigan, U.S.A. – and having to work out our differences, many of which have to do with land etiquette. Much as I would like to avoid such dealings – over hunting, dumping, off-road-vehicle trespass, zucchini and tomato over production, runaway dogs, and found kittens – they are in my face and on my earth and I can't change channels or wad up the page to make them go away. Besides, the conviviality that geography imposes is good. In the ever-closer long run, as the global betrays the local and the local gets wise, neighbors will increasingly have to know and depend on one another.

For me, a place must also have soil and include life forms other than my own. I can't honestly regard my chosen intellectual cohort or even my own species as a full community. Place is a habitat, the ecosystem that hosts the evolution of a whole association of organisms, from the minute and peculiar to the grand and cosmopol-

itan – from soil fungus to black bear, and thousands of species in between. Place is permeated and enlivened by flows of light, water, wind and even seismic energy. Pulses of organisms – migrating birds, butterflies, fish returning to natal streams, mayflies, spring peepers, new generations of mice and voles, and the seasonal visits of hunters or gatherers – all swirl into the vital force of a place. In the country or in the city, the essence of place is wild.

If a place is more than a human thought, to have a sense of place requires the use of all one's senses, and sooner or later, muscle and bone. Semirural northwest Lower Michigan, my home, demands and gratifies full sensory engagement. The weather here refuses to be ignored or minimized. I began this writing one late-November day when it was snowing. The amazement of snow dawns afresh on me, a California transplant, each winter. Snow's arrival begins to impose a white purity on the landscape and to supply the makings of a perfect calm. Early in the blanketing process, the skeletons of the summer's weeds are still exposed, their characteristic dark forms and different colors sketched against the white ground.

The sooty, many-branched knapweed, its wiry stems set all akimbo, the comic pewter topiary of horsemint, the deep sienna pods of Saint-John's-wort all seem brilliant amid the noncolor of cloudy skies and snow-covered earth. While I wallow in the minimalist beauty of this scraggly vegetation, part of what I now know about my place, and a clue to its history, is that most of

the aforementioned are alien plants, profiting from disturbance in the land.

A sense of place requires some loose boundaries. No animal's home range is limitless or random. Ten years ago when I moved to the country I naively imagined that life would be easier than in the city. I was interested in "reinhabitation," which, as defined by bioregionalist Peter Berg and biologist Raymond Dasmann, means "becoming fully alive in and with a place. Applying for membership in a biotic community and ceasing to be an exploiter." Thinking globally was making me crazy; for acting locally I felt I needed a snuggler locale, a place I could comprehend. Small could be beautiful – and hopeful – because small can be observable, intimate, accountable. Small is also more readily exploitable and, alas, sometimes petty, although rarely as destructive as large.



Small communities have yet to attain the strength to escape the idolatry of growth. Power flows to the state, resources to the corporation, and local government can effect change only in the tiniest increments. Zoners must

permit what are deemed reasonable uses of land. This creates big problems in rural locales like mine, where the uses of land determine our future, and so-called development forecloses a lot of possibilities. It's a widespread plight.

Suburban sprawl, roadbuilding, deforestation, replanting with alien trees, farming, grazing, and invasions of exotic plant and animal species may all be moving our ecosystem and its economy toward some simplified but precarious

mean. As the natural world and the human cultural diversity it fosters are forced into a dull sameness, a wealth of local knowledge, skillful means, and decent subsistence are devalued and destroyed, and everyday living is reduced to getting and spending, hustling or passivity.

It has become rare in the world for people to be born, live, and die in the same place where their ancestors' bones rest, in the earth that feeds and finally is fed by all. In the absence of some invitation or inclination to know and care, place may mean nothing more than where you wind up; may be just an address. Yet rightly attended, place teaches us how to be human, reveals the saga of life and how to behave in organic circumstance. Loyalty to place – staying put – brings home the long cycles and grave truths of human life in intimate and inescapable ways, from new babies born to adult struggles for competence, to elders needing care and passing on.

Witness enough weddings and funerals, graduations and divorces and you understand that you are being moved through time in an archetypal procession. In a steady context you see yourself and neighbors learning and failing, suffering and flourishing, growing and dying. This slow experience contrasts the media focus on sports contests, celebrity peccadilloes, current events, and foreign affairs, none of which fosters compassion or maturation of the self. To be preoccupied with these elsewhere spectacles is to be homeless in the soul.

Residing in a real place we must confront the changes in the land – patches of regeneration, swatches of erosion, woods reclaiming old fields, fancy homes palisading the shoreline. It

takes some effort to learn to identify the members of the local forest. It takes years to see that the seasons are both consistent and varied and to learn to cope with the rigors they impose.

Reinhabitation is easier said than done. Easier intended than effected. Those of us who have migrated to our locales from cities bring a thin wash of urban fantasy in our wake and inevitably affect the locale's character. We add our own splash of cultural confusion to the community, and bring momentum to its change.

Neither of the two little towns nearby consists of much more than a post office, a café, a grocery store, a gas station, and a tavern. Cedar and Maple City are innocent as yet of cappuccino, Thai cuisine and naughty lingerie shops, but it may just be a matter of time before these misplaced signs of urbanity and yupward mobility arrive. Traverse City, the region's economic hub 15 miles away, has gained all of the above in the past few years. There's not a dairy, a slaughterhouse, a local rail system, or Grange for miles around though. Few locals under 70, myself included, know what a seasonal diet is like or how to work a root cellar. Our food comes from supermarkets, we now think. The good news is the handful of organic farmers in the area, and their commitment to rebuilding our soil, acre by acre. But the general dearth of basic knowledge marks an amazing decadence here in the solid, stolid, practical Midwest, quite an abrupt disconnection from earlier hardihood won providing for one's household from this land and in this climate, which set such strict terms. It is a radical dependency on far-flung lines of supply and grandiose, opportunistic systems of production and distribution.



That is not to say that the good old days served this place perfectly well. This county's old (circa 1850) European-American settlers brought some disastrously generic ideas about land use with them and the consequences are plain to see: what was a forest became farmland and woodlots, and now is being encroached upon by strip malls and housing developments, a metastasis of practices inaugurated here in the name of civilization. Nevertheless, in their day the settlers understood the sheer necessity for homestead self-reliance and neighborliness. A good many of them were, till mid-century, able to maintain those values. They figured out just enough about the land to make a subsistence living – subsistence, but not luxury or leisure. Even at its longest, though, local history is short. Indian memory goes back further – would test your heart. This sacred place knew how to provide, had bear, wolves, passenger pigeons, massive trees, lakes and streams jumping with fish, lush berry patches. Traces of those times fade into the land's contour. But in a place that has been settled by Europeans for only a century and a half, farms held and worked by the same family are rare and publicly commemorated.

Somewhere between bear habitat and brokerage houses, between unbroken woods and suburbia, we should be able to conjure a reinhabitory vision here, a design for living that would suffice for hundreds of years. We should be able to constrain our wants, supply our needs, and restore much of the land to its wilder ways. Farming and forestry should rightly be the greater part of the plan. They go with the place, ground us.

The morning after Thanksgiving a farmer delivered some straw bales for me to use, first as winter insulation around the base of my writing studio, then as summer mulch. This was an energetic character, a seventyish descendent of the first settler in the township. He's an enthusiastic waltzer and polka dancer. His great grandmother, a physician, rode the 15 miles to her office in Traverse City on horseback, not in a buggy.

Over a neighborly cup of tea and piece of pie, I learned that he was still working the farm his family had owned since the early 'teens. By selling wood, and maple syrup they managed to hold on to their land during the Great Depres-

sion. I also learned that it's wasteful to tap a maple tree too high because the tap stains the wood black. Along with such practical intelligence, he also rolled out a few anecdotes demonstrating himself to be a driver of hard bargains and a good-humored guy, but no one to mess with.

As I listened to him and studied his round, firm visage and piercing blue eyes, all I could think of was the differences between the life of his household (he made several glowing references to his wife's womanly accomplishments – an intricate quilt sewn for a granddaughter to take to college, her home-canned venison mincemeat) and that of mine, of his working knowledge of country ways and my vicarious appreciation of the them. My tenure here is a function of recent choice and romantic principle. His is his heritage. It's unsentimental, involving a lot of hard work and tough thrift. However differently, we are tied to this place. Here and no place else was where we could meet as we did. He informed my sense of place and I'm an addition to his.

With luck I may have a few more decades to devote to the problems and pleasures of living here. If I keep my eyes open and my mind engaged, my local knowledge is bound to grow, and with it, I hope, some fortitude. I expect to see more change in my lifetime than that farmer has in his, with a possible return to the kind of life he knew growing up on a farm during a time of economic disarray, dug in fiercely, cleaving to the land. What I hope is that in the future the civilizational errors bringing big change down on our heads will be seen for what they are, and that our community will get beyond that mystique and further into the work of reinhabitation. For the place we live in is real, and the time for belonging is now.

Stephanie Mills has been speaking out on environmental issues since 1969, when she vowed in a commencement address at Mills College never to bring children into our troubled, overpopulated world. She has written a book about restoring and reinhabiting damaged land, IN SERVICE OF THE WILD (Beacon, 1995), and is editing and writing portions of TURNING AWAY FROM TECHNOLOGY: A NEW VISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY (Sierra Club Books, Fall 1997)

No Problem

By Herley Jim Brown

It dawned on me this morning
that I have no more problems.

No problems!

What a thought!

What will I do with the rest of my life?

I feel a joy creeping in,
an exuberance,
an elation,
an ecstasy.

It's the plants!

The plants are filling me with joy.

Literally.

Bird song.

The birds are in on this, too.

And sunsets and sunrises.

It's a conspiracy!

The clouds are part of it.

And the moon and star sky,
children's voices and their trusting looks,
people's laughter.

Joy!

The Ideal City

By William Vitek

Reprinted with permission from the May/June 1997 issue of *Preservation*.

A walk in the park. A sense of community, what Canadian naturalist John Livingston describes as “an awareness of simultaneous *belonging* to both a society and a place,” accrues slowly – not through large public gestures but through life’s small daily lessons. Mine began 10 years ago in a river valley in northern New York State, a half-rural, half-wild landscape with expansive skies, rocky soils, and five Adirondack rivers slowing to a crawl northward to the St. Lawrence River. Here in my village, population 10,000, I have observed great blue herons, wild turkeys, white-tailed deer, a great horned owl, coyotes and a bald eagle. There are no interstate highways here, no major airports, no subways, no commuter railways. Fewer than 10 high-rise buildings (seven stories or less) have been built in the entire county, the largest in square miles in New York State. There is little crime. Children walk to school, and stranded motorists receive quick assistance. We know our neighbors even if we don’t always like them.

I cannot know for certain whether the move to the country after 30 years of living in cities make possible my commitment to a place and a community or whether it was coincidental with other changes in my life. But I discovered that I was not alone. From the oldest monastic orders to the contemporary back-to-the-land movement, people have been fleeing cities in search of serenity, simplicity, and community. The literary sources of community and place stretch back to Aristotle, Machiavelli (*The Discourses*), and Jefferson — and forward to Gary Snyder,

William Sullivan, and Daniel Kemis. The voices of American writers like Henry David Thoreau, John Muir, and Wendell Berry call out from wild and rural places to warn us away from the traps of contemporary life.

Growing interest in community and place, in the idea of becoming rooted in the land, has engendered a new movement of writing and thinking on communitarian themes. Although this movement, of which I am a part, is not confined to rural places, many of its strongest advocates and exemplars reside there. But what about the city? The work of urban communitarians, while strong on theory and systemwide alternatives, often lacks the personal narratives that put theory to practice. (Kemmis’s *The Good City and the Good Life* is a delightful exception). At first glance the proposition that urban dwellers can make discoveries and commitments similar to their rural counterparts is not easy to defend. How can an urban dweller experience the same deep connection to place and community that seems so natural in the country.

Today’s cities reflect America’s earliest political beginnings. Thomas Jefferson had hoped to nurture America on the traditional republican government used centuries earlier among the Greeks and Romans, believing that equality, virtue, and simple living were found more often in rural and agricultural life than in the crowded cities, “where the people ate each other.” But the views of James Madison and Alexander Hamilton prevailed. Madison stripped away the civic overtones of a republican form of government, calling it merely “a government in which the scheme of

representation takes place.” He likewise turned factionalism and private interest – vices for civic republicans – into virtues in the new American republic. Hamilton claimed that the young nation’s strength and longevity depended on commerce and manufacturing, so he advocated an economic system that encouraged individual ambition and emulated England’s factory system.

The contemporary results, both intended and unforeseen, of these philosophical prescriptions are many: a government at all levels with neither mandate nor interest in promoting civic virtue; a public that participates in the democratic process only minimally and with a divisive notion of self-interest; a nation devoted to commerce, manufacturing, technology, and new markets; a sense of restlessness abetted by unprecedented mobility; and a preponderance of lessons in consumerism – but few in citizenship.

Of course, architects, planners, and developers share some of the blame. So few of our urban places are designed as true cities, *civitates*, where decisions about layout, population density, and future growth are made thoughtfully to promote virtue and civility, not left to whim or chance. Too often the typical American city is haphazard, dirty, congested, decrepit, and loud. If American society were a teenager, the city would be its bedroom. Such an atmosphere fosters distrust and distraction and leads to a slow contraction of our senses.



But this is not the whole story, as any city dweller knows. Urban neighborhoods still offer the proper human scale for daily interactions and the motivation to care about one another. The streets are narrow and

tree lined, the sidewalks wide, and nearly every block has a coffee shop or a newspaper stand. Nor do wild things stop at the city limits. We know that peregrine falcons have nested in Manhattan. Years ago in Brooklyn’s Prospect Park, where I was playing softball instead of writing my dissertation, there was in center field the fragrance of chamomile and in the nearby pond a mallard pair raising a brood.

The problem, then, is not entirely a matter

of where we live, but of how we live as well. Cities can make quite a racket, but it’s our own lives that clatter so. Basil the Great, after leaving the city of Caesarea in the fourth century, wrote, “I have abandoned my life in the town as the occasion of endless troubles, but I have not managed to get rid of myself.” And the Stoic philosopher Seneca observed in his essay “On Noise”: “There can be absolute bedlam without so long as there is no commotion within.... For what is the good of having silence throughout the neighborhood if one’s emotions are in turmoil?”

NURTURING A SENSE OF PLACE

with Stephanie Mills & Bill Vitek



WE SHALL NOT CEASE FROM EXPLORATION, AND THE END OF
ALL OUR EXPLORING WILL BE TO ARRIVE WHERE WE STARTED
AND KNOW THE PLACE FOR THE FIRST TIME. T.S. ELIOT

*Community Service 55th
Annual Conference*

OCTOBER 2 - 4, 1998

Glen Helen, Yellow Springs, Ohio

Cosponsored by the Glen Helen Ecology Institute

"MANY OF US REMAIN VISITORS IN A LANDSCAPE
WE CALL HOME, AND ARE ESTRANGED FROM THE
PEOPLE WHO, IN ANOTHER TIME, WOULD RIGHTLY
BE CALLED OUR NEIGHBORS." W. Vitek

What is this thing called Place?

What do we mean by sense of place?

This year, Community Service's fall conference, *Nurturing a Sense of Place*, will focus on the importance of place and sense of place in developing sustainable communities. We believe that nurturing a sense of place is vital to the health of our communities, our region and life on this planet. The goal of this conference is to help participants develop practical models for nurturing a sense of place in our various communities.

With the help of seasoned guides Stephanie Mills, author of *In Service of the Wild*, and Bill Vitek, co-editor with Wes Jackson of *Rooted in the Land*, we will explore the meaning of 'place' within our Ohio Valley Bioregion. As our journey continues, we will seek to understand, through the use of mapping, hiking, bodywork, storytelling and ritual, what it truly means to have a 'sense of place.'

A well-balanced schedule of presentations, exercises and small group discussions will keep us on track as we move steadily toward our goal of finding new ways to reinhabit the places, communities and world in which we live.

Throughout the weekend we will have ample opportunity to develop a sense of place. . .and community, with walks in the Glen Helen Nature Preserve, networking with others, meal preparation. . .and simply having fun!

Location: Conference workshops will be held at the Glen Helen Building and meals will be served at the Outdoor Education Center Lodge. Both buildings are located in the Glen Helen Nature Preserve and are a 15 minute walk from each other. Transportation between sites will be provided for those needing it. Directions will be mailed upon registration.

Housing Options: There will be on-site accommodations for conference

participants at the OEC's bunkhouse lodge and in host homes in Yellow Springs.

There are a limited number of spaces in private homes, so please make your request early - and no later than September 14.

For other housing options, including camping, a local bed and breakfast, and a motel, please call us at 937 767-2161.



Childcare:

Childcare will be provided for children between the ages of 4 to 12. Older children are encouraged to participate in the conference as they wish. Childcare requests must be made by September 11.

Meals: Wholesome vegetarian meals, using local, organically grown ingredients are included in the cost of the conference.

Conference Packet: A conference packet will be provided at the conference which will include a schedule, a bibliography and a copy of *Discovering Your Life-Place: A First Bioregional Workbook*

Conference Resource Center: Books and other resources will be available for purchase at the conference. If you or your organization would like to sell or distribute materials please let us know.

Scholarships: If cost is an issue, please contact us. We do not want cost to stand in the way of your attending this conference.

Our Co-Sponsors: We are pleased to have the Glen Helen Ecology Institute as our co-sponsor this year. The Institute is a regional environmental studies center which oversees the Glen Helen Nature Preserve.

The Institute is generously providing the use of its facilities for this conference.

"SOMETIME, SOMEWHERE, YOU'VE GOT TO MAKE YOUR STAND; DECLARE A TIE TO THE LAND YOU ARE STANDING ON AND TO THE LARGER COMMUNITY OF THE LAND."

S. Mills

To register please return this form with your check to Community Service, Inc. P.O. Box 243, Yellow Springs, OH 45387. Call 937 767-2161 for more information.

Name _____

Phone _____

Address _____

Early Registration: Before September 11:

Register me/us for the conference including lodging
for Community Service Members \$80/person _____

for non-members, conference fee
includes annual membership fee \$95/person _____

I/we would like to stay at the OEC bunkhouse _____

I/we would like to stay in a local host home _____
(you will be notified of your host before the conference)

Register my child(ren) ages: _____ at \$50/child _____

Register me/us for the conference without lodging
or breakfasts

for Community Service Members \$55/person _____

for enrolling members \$70/person _____

Register my child(ren) ages: _____ at \$35/child _____

After September 11:

Register me/us for the conference lodging
for Community Service Members \$95/person _____

for non-members, conference fee
includes annual membership fee \$110/person _____

Register me/us for the conference without
lodging or breakfasts

for Community Service Members \$70/person _____

for enrolling members \$85/person _____

I would like to contribute toward the
scholarship fund _____

I wish to renew my membership at \$25 _____

TOTAL ENCLOSED

NURTURING A SENSE OF PLACE

OCTOBER 2 - 4, 1998

Glen Helen,
Yellow Springs, Ohio

COMMUNITY SERVICE, INC.
P. O. Box 243
Yellow Springs OH 45387

Presenters:

Stephanie Mills is the author of several books, an editor, lecturer and activist who has concerned herself with the fate of the Earth and humanity since 1969. A longtime bioregionalist, Mills lives in Northwest Lower Michigan on 35 acres of land she has been working to restore. In 1996 she was named one of Utne Reader's Visionaries. She loves her home ground, but is frequently called elsewhere to give talks about the importance of staying put.

Bill Vitek is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Director of the Environmental Science and Policy Program at Clarkson University in northern New York's St. Lawrence River Valley. His essays on community and rural life have appeared in various journals. Bill is also a jazz pianist and composer, with two award-winning recordings of jazz nursery rhymes. He lives with his wife and children in Potsdam, New York.

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Rather than cultivating repose, we find ourselves hurrying through our daily tasks. How often we define the place where we are now in terms of where we next have to be. Time is a taskmaster, or worse, an opponent to be cheated or squeezed. Even our leisure time is organized, scheduled, and hurried. We distract ourselves with television, Walkmans, car phones, appointment books, and the World Wide Web.

To combat this communal dysfunction, many social critics call for heavy reinforcements: large-scale urban renewal projects, government programs, social legislation, radical paradigm shifts, and even revolution. But if the urban din is not the only cause of chaos, neither is the work being done in urban architecture, civic renewal, and historic preservation the only solution for promoting civility and place. What creates great cities is the interplay of well-designed streets and neighborhoods and the capacity of urban dwellers to be aware of their place and of one another – to become citizens. The most well-designed city will have little impact on civic virtue if we fail to reinforce that virtue within ourselves.

Walking is the single best way to experience the here and now. It mimics the beating heart, a rhythm in which the body takes obvious delight.

Awareness begins, to use poet and writer Kathleen Norris's words, by "being grounded in the present." Whether in rush-hour traffic or on a crowded subway platform, the present moment is the only moment in which we encounter our world directly. It's a tenet of the world's philosophical and spiritual traditions that living mindfully in the present puts us in direct contact with ourselves and others.

Combined with the now of the present is the here of this place. Black Elk, the Sioux medicine man, said that the center of the world is right where we are, our own bodies mini-universes interacting with weather, season, and geography. Sun, sky, wind, water, flower, soil, rock – it's all there, here, in the city, if we're only willing to look.

Walking is the single best way to experience the here and now. It mimics the beating heart, a rhythm in which the body takes obvious delight. Walking is also the best pace by which our senses can take in the world. We hear conversations, see faces, taste the humid air, sense a change in weather. Walking puts our bodies to good use, and it gives us the freedom to choose our own pace and route. City walking is sometimes anything but slow and deliberate, but even while walking on New York's Broadway or Chicago's Michigan Avenue one can experience the immediate world and its relationships in their chaotic wholeness.

We should also resist the promptings of our divided brain to separate life into work and leisure, weekday and weekend, city and country. Everyone needs to visit quiet and wild places from time to time, whether in a city's botanical gardens, parks, or riverfront, or out in the hinterland. But they should not be viewed as escapes from our urban circumstances so much as opportunities to see

more clearly what our daily lives can become when we pay attention to cycles, nature, neighbors, and our own rhythms. If the city is where we live, then it must also be the place where we come alive. Springtime buds and pollen cover sidewalks and windshields; rain has a scent; snow is wet or dry.

Cities are not simply the sum of their concrete and steel. One can purchase maps that highlight landscapes and not interstates, that categorize by geology, watershed and bioregion. What was this place a century, a millennium, or an ice age ago? Who lived here before European settlement? What is the history of this building or neighborhood? Orient yourself with compass, map, and history book, and you'll begin to notice wind direction or the sun's lowest point in winter or time's longer cycles.

Though nature unencumbered is sometimes scarce in cityscapes, the human interactions of community and neighborhood are abundant. Corner stores, ethnic restaurants, laundromats, churches, homes for the elderly, sports teams, taverns, fairs, festivals, and local government provide the context and customs that make social and civic life possible and meaningful. Craftsmanship can also be a source of community. Bakers, tailors, farmers, and woodworkers offer both their skills and stories; their shops and markets emanate the sounds and smells of good work, tradition, and the materials of their trades. Regular customers feel at home and stay just a moment longer, perhaps with a growing sense of belonging.

These suggestions, of course, are starting points. For those of us who feel especially rootless, conscious acts of rebellion may be required. Turn off the television for a month. Walk more, and not just for exercise. Take up a hobby, what forester and philosopher Aldo Leopold describes as "a defiance of the contemporary": gardening, bird watching, archery, snow-shoeing, meditating, painting. Take a species inventory of a local park. Instead of surfing the Web, read the masters of nature writing (my favorite is Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac*). Join a local nonprofit. Slow down your breathing instead of turning up your Walkman. Slow down.



But don't expect immediate results. Awareness is a process of getting our choices back. It requires active remembering, living in the present and in the presence of others, commitment to the future, and a willingness to stand out in the crowd. Even the most dedicated citizen may be defeated by city life: Seneca conceded that it is sometimes simpler to keep away from the din altogether, explaining in "On Noise" that after living for a time in the city, he was moving elsewhere. "What I wanted was to give myself a test and some practice," he wrote. "Why should I need to suffer the torture any longer...?"

I have no desire to return to an urban setting, fearful, I suppose, of losing what fledgling awareness I have gained and unwilling to leave a place that has a hold on me. But I return often to the cities of my youth, and I recall with pleasure the traditions and neighborhoods I left behind. Last summer, while visiting my parents in Schenectady, N.Y., I attended for the first time in 20 years an annual Italian feast in my childhood grammar school and local parish, a three-day affair with music, food, and familiar faces. I said hello to some of my teachers (nuns who seemed immune to aging), reminisced with old classmates about the hell we raised, and observed the interactions of people absolutely at home in this setting. The band played to an appreciative audience of elders sitting in folding chairs while young children weaved through the streets. Folks ate, drank, and danced.

It was their feast, their time together. They were a community celebrating itself. I felt a twinge of sadness because I once belonged there but left: Now I was nothing more than a welcome visitor. But the vitality I felt on that summer night is real, and it's evident in neighborhoods and cities throughout America.

For those who remain in urban areas by choice or by necessity, there is hope not in leaving, but in staying put and digging in. Home is where the here is, community and place just other names for citizen and civitas, ancient ideals and natural sentiments open to each of us when we become practiced in the slow and steady expansion of the self. Like the heat of a fire on a jack-pine cone that frees the seed for regeneration, awareness is the focused energy that makes both city and citizen prosper.

William Vitek teaches philosophy at Clarkson University in Potsdam, N.Y., and is coeditor, with Wes Jackson, of Rooted in the Land: Essays on Community and Place.

The Blanding of America

by Jim Sullivan

Have you noticed that anywhere you travel in the U. S. these days, all retail business places look the same? Young folks think this is the way it's always been. Sadly, that's not the case. In fact, this sweet sameness started in earnest only 30 or so years ago. The pace, though, has accelerated year after year. Now even more retail establishments, all alike, are spreading like latex paint over this country of ours. Consequently, these days most businesses are part of some chain, franchise, or network of this or that national firm. And thanks to them, hardly any differences remain between our cities, states and regions. Most, therefore, have become redundant.

Yes, happily, diversity, especially in retail stores, has finally been stamped out or sent packing forever. And I, for one, am glad. At long last, individualism and uniqueness have been evicted from our land. Blessed conformity and similarity have now filled the gap. How lucky could our country be?

Once thought, probably like most folks, that this big, beautiful, bland of the United States, which has come upon us, was a fluke, without plan, pattern, or preconceived notion. Now I'm not so sure. Something this large doesn't just happen for no reason at all. I'm coming to the conclusion that it was all planned and executed by big business. And if true, I say, "Score one for them."

All of us Americans should be grateful for the national chains, networks, and franchises. They've taken the space, thank goodness, left by local business owners. Members of that group have been closing their stores or going belly up all over the place, one right after another.



Admittedly, these local business people knew their customers' needs as no one else did. And, contrary to the national firms, homegrown business profits did go back into the local economy. But all that ever did for it was to provide the financial wherewithal for more local business people to grow their existing companies or to start new ones.

Nowadays, that's all changed for the good. Profits from branches of national firms in every community are sent to a large headquarter's city. From there, firms dole out their largesse where and when deemed fitting.

But what of the situation that every town, city and metropolis in the U. S. looks alike? Well, we have received a big benefit with that: no matter what community or area of the country you're in, you'll feel right at home in a similar looking, equally priced, and, where food is concerned, same tasting retail business establishment. In fact, once inside, you'd be hard pressed to know specifically what city you were actually in. But most of all, we local customers can take advantage of the lower prices.

I'm happy, then, that everything is alike in America today. Individualism may have once made this country great and strong. But now, it only confuses the business issue, not to mention the public at large. And the best part of all this sameness is that we consumers know, always, what to expect. Life no longer holds any surprises for us, at least not in these nationally based but locally owned retail businesses.

Jim Sullivan of South Bend, IN has also been published in *Indiana Business*, *California Highway Patrolman*, *Mostly Maine*, *Cooking Light*, and *Tucumcari Literary Review*.

BOOK REVIEWS

GAVIOTAS, by Alan Weisman; Chelsea Green Publishing; 1998; 227 pp; \$22.95 hardcover.

BY WALTER TULECKE

Gaviotas is about the birth, hope and dreams of a community located in the savannah countryside of Columbia, South America. It is the story of Paolo Lugari and his vision of Gaviotas as a model village community. In the treeless grassland the community residents have planted millions of pine trees under which a tropical rain forest has regenerated. For the Gavioterros, their community intends to show the way to live in the grasslands which make up 250,000,000 hectares of South America.

Gaviotas has attracted the attention of the world, yet Gaviotas works with the poor, including the Guahibo Indians who are their neighbors. Many engineers have come there to "create" solar heated showers, windmills, double action water pumps, local "gaviones" cement, a cassava shredder, a parabolic solar dryer, cane crushers, peanut shellers, and many other devices.

The 200 or so residents of the community eat in a common dining hall, workers live in single rooms, and everyone gets paid the same. There is no government, no judge, no jail, no crime, no cigarettes, alcohol only in one's room, no marriage, and no guns. Room and board are free. Students spend time in the carpentry shop, hydroponic gardens, tree nursery, and the hospital because the community needs people "who can see all the connections and possibilities."

The people of Gaviotas tend to make music first, then talk about their problems. Their

transport system is based on the bicycle. Gavioterros know that theirs is an egalitarian social microcosm in the midst of Columbia's drug wars, guerrillas, poverty, and violence. They know that if they can make a life here in the grasslands of Columbia, they can open up the possibility to others in Columbia and the world.

Walter Tulecke is a Community Service, Inc. Board member and former Antioch professor.

THE POWER OF PLACE: SACRED GROUND IN NATURAL AND HUMAN ENVIRONMENTS, by James A. Swan, Ed.; Quest Books, 1991; 365 pp; \$14.95 paperback.

BY MARIANNE MACQUEEN

A fundamental element of religion is an intimate relationship with the land on which the religion is practiced.

Vine Deloria, Jr.

One of the most powerful books I've read on place is *The Power of Place*, edited by James Swan. It has enriched my understanding of the meanings and dimensions of sacred space. An anthology of writing by thirty-three authors, the book represents a small portion of the contributions to the *Spirit of Place* symposia held in California in 1988 and '89, and organized by Swan and his wife, Roberta. The authors come from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds and the book covers a broad range of topics. The articles are divided into five categories: The Meaning of Place; Traditional Views of Place; Ancient and Modern Geomancies; Modern Science and Ancient Wisdom; and The Spirit of Place in Modern Times.

Swan notes that Pliny the Elder (23 -79 A.D.)

first coined the term “geomancy” after he had met Persian magi who used stones to determine the right action for each place. Author Richard Feather Anderson, whose article, “Geomancy” is included in the book writes:

One of the most important uses of geomancy has been the enhancement of place – or sense of belonging to a place. Basically, a sense of belonging to a place is generated when an individual or community consciously makes a relationship with its environs. This process involves pacing ourselves physically and psychologically within ever-expanding circles of relationships – with the place we call home.

While each article can stand by itself, a complete reading of the book takes one around the globe, back in time and forward again to the present. A caution: this book is like a rich dessert. Take a little time and savor it.

By and About our Members

Board member Jim Crowfoot writes of a workshop on simple living: It was good to be on a panel with Peggy and Ken Champney along with another couple from Grand Rapids...and a woman who is a Zen Buddhist priest in Ann Arbor and uses mindfulness as the basis of her commitment to simplicity and simple living. (We) also did a workshop on sustainable local communities which included sharing about the work we have been involved with in the Grand Traverse Bay region. Congratulations to you for all the work you are doing to develop the publication and the organization.

Jim Crowfoot, Ann Arbor, MI.

A belated thank you to Arthur Morgan, who lent 20 war objectors his box library during my 1943-45 stay as a conscientious objector at Danbury Prison. *The Small Community* and other co-op books had a major impact on my thinking. My teaching career has lasted fifty-five years. I think we twenty objectors had over 450 years of college represented in our cell block at Danbury Prison – twenty conscientious objectors who procured better food, better education, better conditions for inmates. So, thanks to the late Arthur Morgan for remembering the conscientious objectors and lending his library.

Roger W. Axford, Tempe, AZ.

(Mr. Axford is President of The Recareering Institute, involved in the Coalition for Justice and Peace, and author of fifteen books).

Your excerpt, “Growing Sustainable Communities,” was, to say the least, expert. The system described is fraught with the brambles of common commercial practice: violent, grasping, drawn by the magnet of greed. To navigate these snares will take directed preparation and moral intuition. This might be the subject of another book with the title: *Preparation for Growing.*

Don and Doris Cuddihee, Greer, SC.

If you have information on a large composter to handle cow, sheep and pig manure that produces useable gas. I would appreciate receiving it. In our Romanian villages we have a surplus of animal manure, but methane gas is very expensive. We waste it! We're still spending half of our time in Transylvanian villages where all the conditions of community exist, but they now often indulge in every divisive competition for wealth and power.

*Donald S. Harrington, Peconic, NY.
P. O. Box 432
Peconic, NY 11958*

Mid-year letter, Ernest Morgan. Greetings for the 62nd time. I'm nearing my 93rd birthday and feel the added years but I'm deeply concerned about the state of the world. The claim that the American economy is "doing just fine" is hog wash....

I am happy that the Arthur Morgan School operates in a spirit of caring and sharing; that my old firm, now the Antioch Company, under Lee's leadership has 600 employees and is employee-owned, and that Celo Community is gentle with the environment. I invite my friends to examine their lives and their surroundings – and live for the future.

Ernest Morgan, Burnsville, NC.

Many thanks for keeping in touch with me. My involvement in community work in England, started in 1960 with the works of Richard and Hephzibah Menuhin Hauser's book, *The Fraternal Society*. They conclude that a holistic, generalist approach is needed for individuals' and societies' problems. In the past social education and standards of behavior were taught by the whole family. Very little has replaced that except for paid "social workers" who themselves have not learned except from books.

We have a "tool at hand" in the Hausers' *Handbook of Group Work Practice*. David Jensen at Box 416, Galena, OH has a collection of their work. The Socratic Approach reinforces the how to think process as opposed to the media's what to think. We need to challenge our own conditioning and put our own mental house in order. Thank you for provoking me to write.

Jack Atkin, Loughton, Essex, England.

Announcements

August 23 -24, Plant Spirit with Author Eliot Cowan. A Benefit for The Highlands Nature Sanctuary. Contact: Highlands Nature Sanctuary, P. O. Box 457, Bainbridge, OH 45612. (937) 365-1362.

August 28 - 30: Annual meeting of the membership of the Bioregional Association of the Northern Americas (BANA) to be held at Sun Rock Farm just outside Cincinnati, Ohio. Send registrations to Frank Traina, Sun Rock Farm, 104 Gibson Lane, Wilder, KY 41076, Central Ohio Bioregion. (606) 781-5502.
Email: ftraina@igc.apc.org

Sept. 2 - Nov. 6, 1998: Sacred Run Foundations announces the Ohio/Mississippi Rivers Canoe Journey from Pittsburgh, PA to New Orleans, LA. For applications write: Sacred Run, P. O. Box 315, Newport, KY 41071. For questions contact Jim Toren, (513) 943-1229, Sacred Run Office: (606) 431-2346. E-mail: canoejourney@webtv.net



Sept. 9, 1998 Free Action-Oriented National Conference. No Purchase Necessary: Building the Voluntary Simplicity Movement. USC Davidson Conference Center, Los Angeles. Host: *Seeds of Simplicity*. Co-Sponsors: Ad-busters Media Foundation. Center for a New American Dream. Jane Goodall Institute, New Road Map Foundation, Sierra Club, Simple Living Journal, Simple Living Network, University of Northern Iowa-Center for Energy and Environmental Education. (818) 247-4332 or SeedsOfSim@aol.com

Sept. 25 - 27, 1998: Ecology/Spirituality: No Separation Conference, Bloomington, IN., Daniel Martin, Keynote Speaker. "Ecology is the science of belonging: the study of how things are interconnected." Contact: Lucille Bertuccio, 815 S. Rose Avenue Bloomington, IN 47401. (812) 331-2726. E-mail: lburtuccio@indiana.edu

Sept. 26 - 27, 1998: Earth Conference '98: "*The Canticle of Creation*" Cosponsored by Sisters of St. Francis, Sylvania, OH, Sisters of St. Francis, Tiffin, OH, and the Franciscan Federation. Contact: Earth Conference, Sisters of St. Francis, 6832 Convent Blvd., Sylvania, OH 43560-2897. Or call (419) 885-3211 ext. 220. E-mail: rsobczak@lourdes.edu.

October 2-4, 1998: Council of All Beings Facilitator Training. The Council of all Beings was created in 1985 by Joanna Macy and John Seed. Contact: EarthConnection, 370 Neeb Road, Cincinnati, OH 45233, (513) 451-3932. Fax: (513) 451-3977.

October 7 - 11, 1998 Annual Conference, National Association of Housing Cooperatives at Disney's Coronado Springs Resort, Lake Buena Vista, FL. Contact: (703) 549-5201 or fax (703) 549-5204.

October 8 - 10, 1998 Annual Communal Studies Conference: *Change and Dissolution: the Shape of Community*. Zoar Village State Memorial, Zoar, OH, by *The Communal Studies Association*. Contact: William Gates, Curator of History, Ohio Historical Society, 1982 Velma Avenue, Columbus, OH 43211, (800) 262-6195.
E-mail: kmfzoar@compuserve.com

October 15 - 18, 1998 The Society for Utopian Studies. 23rd annual meeting. Montreal. Contact: Prof. Beatriz de Alba-Koch, Dept. of Hispanic Studies, McGill University, 1001 Sherbrooke Street, West Montreal, Quebec, Canada H3A1G5 (514) 398-6657; Fax (514) 398-8239.

October 17 - 24, 1998 Findhorn Community Conference: *Creating Sustainable Community - Here, There and Everywhere*. Presenters include numerous national and internationally known leaders and writers in the field of sustainable community. Contact: Roger Doudna, Findhorn Community, The Park, Foreres IV 36 OTZ, Moray, Scotland
E-Mail: rdoudna@findhorn.org

November 21 -28, 1998: Second Bioregional Council of the Americas in Mazunte, Sanctuary of the Sea Turtle, watershed on the coast of Oaxaca, Mexico. Local field trips, interaction with local organic agriculture cooperatives, ecological restoration and construction, workshops. Contact Beatrice Briggs, Turtle Island Office, 4035 Ryan Road, Blue Mounts, WI 53517; 608) 767-3931; fax: 608/767-3932; E-mail: beabriggs@servidor.unam.mx.

Opportunities & Resources

The negative effects of usury/interest in the U. S. economy is the topic of a provocative three page article by Community Service member Larry Dansinger. Because of space limitations we were not able to include it in this issue, but it may be obtained by writing to him at P. O. Box 776, Monroe, ME 04951-0776 or Community Service, Inc. Larry gives some ways for individuals to get out of the interest/debt system, which would have implications for everyone who has money invested – such as Community Service which is partially supported by an endowment. We would be interested in feed-back on Larry's ideas.

Aprovecho Research Center will hold a 10 week internship program for skills in sustainable lifestyles. Interns from 17 to 65 may learn about appropriate technology, permaculture, alternative building techniques, organic agriculture and sustainable forestry. Rigorous hands-on experience. Tuition: \$1,800. includes room and board. Contact: Aprovecho Research Center, 80574 Hazelton Road, Cottage Grove, OR 97424 (541) 942-8198.

Eco-actions: positive impacts on our economy and ecology. Live near your work and end commuter headaches. An innovative Maryland program offers employees who move closer to their work \$3,000 towards closing costs of buying a house. The idea is to rebuild neighborhoods that already have infrastructure in place, creating livable communities, encouraging smart growth, and ending commuter gridlock. As people move in, businesses will follow, recognizing the newly created niche in the neighborhood. The incentives are being offered by the Maryland State Dept. of Housing and Community Development, along with local governments and

employers, each contributing \$1,000 to the grants. To find out how to initiate such a program contact Kerry Whitacre, Maryland Dept. of Housing and Community Development (410) 514-7204.

From May until August, in different settings, YES! Camps (Youth Environmental Sanity), will bring people from all over the world together for intensive seven-day environmental workshops, focusing on building sustainable living skills, promoting racial equality, and organizing for Earth. Contact: YES! Camps, 420 Bronco Road, Soquel, CA 95073 (408) 662-0793.

Positive Futures Network. Networking for a more just, sustainable and compassionate future. David Korten, author of *When Corporations Rule the World*, reviewed in the April - June issue of *Community Service Newsletter*, is chairman of the board and his wife, Fran Korten, is the new executive director. Positive Futures Network publishes *Yes! A Journal of Positive Futures*, and offers a long distance service (Affinity) which donates 5% of receipts to the Network. For information: (206) 842-0216. Fax: (206) 842-5208.

Quest for Peace is seeking funds to aid in the crisis caused by El Nino in Central America. El Salvador has lost 30% of its coffee harvest, Guatamala 10% of its grain, and Panama thousands of cattle, with shipping in the Canal curtailed by lack of fresh water. Mexico and Nicaragua have suffered hundreds of out-of-control forest fires. Below average rainfall has shrunk rivers, water supplies and electrical generating reservoirs. Grain prices have doubled. For more information contact Quest for Peace, Quixote Center, P. O. Box 5206, Hyattsville, MD 20782

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