

Volume 1, Issue 1

Spring/Summer 2007



The sandy soil of the Midwest Savannas is home to the stunted black oaks and many rare plants and animals

BLACK OAK CENTER FOR SUSTAINABLE RENEWABLE LIVING

The Post Carbon Clearing

Sustainability in the African American Community

By Frederick D. Carter, co-founder

“Sustainability” is the new buzz word. It is tide to the burgeoning green economy. It borders on being as abused as the word “love”. Major corporations see *sustainability* as a means to prolong their power, domination and wealth. In truth, the term is malleable. It means different things to different people. In the face of eminent resource depletion and climate change, sustainability is destined to mark a new era in the human experience on our planet earth. The common threads of sustainability in an ecological context are:

The equitable distribution of resources and opportunities

Living in balance environmentally, socially, and economically.

Acknowledging our connectedness with everything and everyone.

These are the very principles that express themselves fully in any healthy ecosystem and is the basis of permaculture concepts.

In 1863, 2 years before the Emancipation Proclamation, *black gold* or crude oil was commercially produced for the first time in Titusville Pennsylvania. The production of the then very inexpensive, most energy dense form of fuel put closure on the Agricultural Era of the south that was fueled by black bodies and gave way to the Industrial Era that was spearheaded by the north.

Energy dense crude oil and all its by products is still the cornerstone of life as we currently know it here in the United States.

Despite the peaking of U.S. oil production in the 1970’s, American life has been far from energy efficient. Consumption, not con-

servation has been tightly woven into our lifestyles. The United States is the biggest contributor to CO2 emissions, the major greenhouse gas that is fostering global warming/ climate change.

The U.S. consumes over 25% of the world’s fossil fuel resources but we are less than 5% of the world’s citizens.

Depleting fossil fuel reserves will not be able to sustain current consumption in the all too near future. Surely as we have survived every turn and bend: slavery, Reconstruction, the Nadir and the Great Migration, the Civil Rights Era and now, sustainability will have to be more and more a part of our daily lives. (see pg 2)

Our Commitment: Safe Healing Spaces

by Jifunza Wright Carter M.D., M.P.H., co-founder

I’m sure many of you have had the experience of meeting someone and knowing from the time you met , your destiny was tied for a very special purpose. That is how it has been since the very first day I met my husband Fred. We spent our time when our love was fresh and new not in heated passion nor

dreams of possessions but rather how we could make a difference in the world, for our people and humanity. We spoke of *safe, healing spaces*. Our plan was that we would at first need to make a lot of money and then, we would be able to “*heal just because*”.

So, we set out, not so young and full hope in a rickety boat on a sea of possibility.

Of course there were many storms. we caught some huge fish: (see page 2)

Special points of interest:

- Black Oaks Chicago
- Introduction to Sustainability
- Family Renewable Energy Camp
- Outdoor Leadership Skills Family Encampments
- E-WALES
- Ways to Power Down: An Energy Descent
- Projects at Black Oaks on the Savanna



Black Oaks live to be only 80 to 90 years old

Sustainability in the African American Community

What is sustainability in the African American community? Clearly, the current paradigm that we live inside of is unsustainable. Rising fuel costs and a widening gap of have and have nots has counted too many of us out. Perhaps the growing rates of youth violence and homicides fit uncomfortably well with “the less there are, the less has to be shared?” While our plight and future looks bleak, we do have a great strength. Our strength is our heritage, Our Ancestors were masterful in sustainability. They knew how to grow their own food and provide for their every need. They had an Ancient Wisdom that allowed us to thrive in harmony with nature for thousands of years, long before our oppression. *We must now return and fetch it or in the terms of the Akan of Ghana, West*

Africa, San Kofa. San Kofa is sustainability for us. Accessing the Ancient Wisdom must be cultivated to turn this path of destruction around.

In present day time, we are at an impasse. Our current culture and values have been driven by parts, not the whole. The challenge is not in going out and chasing our piece of the pie in the new green economy. We must weave a new way of life that is collective, cooperatively sharing and efficiently utilizing the resources we do have. Once again, we are being called to be self sufficient and self determined.

Permaculture is confirmation of the indigenous wisdom our Ancestors knew; *we live in relationship to the entire earth.* The answer to resource depletion and global warming lies in our ability to ac-

cess the collective knowing within ourselves. As a community we must redesign and redefine our local environments. We must become regenerative within our geographic bounds for generations to come.

Applying indigenous wisdom with sustainable technology will be the rudder for transitioning our people and humanity to a post carbon world, abundantly.

“The linking of those gone, ourselves here, those coming; our continuation, our flowing not along any meretricious channel but along our living way: it is that remembrance that calls us.”

Two Thousand Seasons, Ayi Kwei Armah, Third World Press, 1979

Safe Healing Spaces

Fred secured a multi-million dollar contract managing General Motors’ 2nd largest distribution center in Chicago Heights. This came after having serious receivable problems in the aftermath of 911. There were many days and nights when I felt much like “The Old Man and the Sea”, doing all we could to bring our catch back to shore while being bombarded by hungry predators. When Fred lost the contract in 2003, it was devastating. The dream of healing just because became a life necessity. Thank God we had secured what we now call “Black Oaks” There were days when we watched a clear open sky from sun rise to sun set. We allowed the earth of the Black Oak Savanna to heal and ground us in our commitment once more. Clearly, the life we had lived “going to get the money” we very unsustainable. As the earth healed us, we searched for another way to be; in harmony and alignment. Looking for a new niche, Fred became interested in renewable energy. The first book that altered our way of living was Richard Heinberg’s, *The Party is Over.*

As Fred began to regain his strength, he read and shared with me more and more. We imagined a life with 20, 40, 50 plus % less energy. In the winter, we turned down our thermostat to 62 and wore coats. In the heat of the summer, we did not bother to cut on the central air. We cooled our home by shading passive solar heat and drawing in cooling tree lined west winds. We reminded ourselves to have “only sustainable conversations” when we were headed towards hurting each other. We stood in grocery store aisles brimming with food and imagined a time that the shelves could be bare. I, known for dressing well would find something in catalogs that I would love to have and in the height of my desire, throw the catalog away. We no longer aspired to “some a day” living in one of those big mansions we passed on our morning walks.

We were practicing curtailment and conservation.

What was missing was community.

For Fred’s 50th birthday, friends and family rolled up in gas guzzling SUVs in the cold of January. Many of the people Fred loved and admired laughed and debated about the fallacy of eminent resource depletion. The 3 plus dollar per gallon gas prices hit later that year. By the time we were all mourning the tragedy of Katrina, no one was laughing or debating anymore. Since, we have held community forums classes and lectures throughout the Midwest. Many of us are poised and coming together to make the necessary changes above all for our children.

The vision and the mission of Black Oaks Center for Sustainable Renewable Living has been carved from our hearts.

We invite you to join us in creating a “life boat”, safe healing spaces for our people and humanity.

Black Oaks Center Chicago

Much has happened since the Black Oaks Center for Sustainable Renewable Living (BOCSRL) held the first African American Community Forum on Peak Oil at the Betty Shabazz International Charter School during Black History Month, February 2006.

A core of community folk including Rufaro Teresa Prim and Heather Parish, spawned coming together for a community visioning which took place over the spring and summer in several locations including the Center for Neighborhood Technology and the Women's Business Development Center.

A 3 to 5 year practical vision was pieced together by wide array of participants including guests other parts of the Midwest (Detroit, Michigan and Milwaukee, Wisconsin)

Our values statement :

As concerned African American that want to leave a legacy of sustainability for future generations, we are committed to:

- *Learning how to function as a collective, and working for the greater good of the whole.*
- *Honoring the sacredness of life.*
- *Educate our community first about the problem and skills to mitigate the problem.*
- *Strengthening of the infrastructure of the African American Family and Community.*

Our vision has been broken down into things that can be done on a personal level, in the community and for economic re-localization regenerative efforts with the primary focus being food and energy. Personal practices included:

- Recycling
- Buying locally grown healthy foods
- Buy Local as much as possible
- Recycle & Conserving
- Participating in Cooperative Efforts (Food Buying Clubs, Share a Ride, Energy Cooperatives)
- Improving Health through Self-Care
- Create Edible Landscapes
- Upgrade energy efficiency of home/businesses

Community Wide:

- Education
- Skills Building (energy conservation, urban agriculture, retrofitting for increased energy efficiency projects)
- 25% of all African American homes to have energy audits.
- Prepare residents for "green careers" (solar, wind installation, water management etc)
- Residents learning skills of energy conservation

In the winter of 2006 we accepted an invite to meet with Suzanne Mallec-McKenna, Deputy Commissioner of the City of Chicago, Department of the Environment (DOE). In the spring of this year, BOCSRL and a number of Southside organizations met with the DOE to address sustainable community development and cleaning up environmental toxins. From that initial meeting, the following organizations participated in seminal meetings that created

E -WALES, environmental principals that we are collectively embracing:

B.I.G. (Blacks in Green)

Black United Fund

Chicago State University

Eden Place

Fuller Park Development Corp.

God's Gang

Illinois Institute for Technology

The Southside Preservation Coalition

We invite other organizations to join us in embracing these environmental principles and live them for ourselves, our communities and future generations

(Please see the E-WALES environmental principles on page 6)

Black Oaks Center on the Savanna, Pembroke Illinois

Family Renewable Energy Camp

June 23rd or July 14, 2007

10 to 3 p.m.

\$75 each family member (min. of 4)

This one day intensive will provide the whole family hands on exploration of biomass, solar, wind , hydrogen based fuels and food production. Children will experience how energy from the sun and the wind are converted into electricity and how methane is made from natural organic materials. Families will participate in the installation of a solar powered filtration system.

Healthy organic locally grown lunch and snacks will be served.

Outdoor Leadership Survival Wilderness Training

Family Encampment

June 29 to July 1st, 2007

\$85/person

Learn essential skills during this weekend encampment: compass reading, identifying edible plants, how to start a fire without matches and team building

Introduction to Sustainability & Permaculture

Fred & Jifunza Carter

Aug 11th, 2007, 10 to 4 p.m.

Join Fred & Jifunza as they share the basics of permaculture

principles and how they apply to our personal lives and any living domain as a means to prepare for an energy descent and to improve the effectiveness of your life and those around you.

\$50 per person

Healthy, organic local locally grown meal and snacks served.

Projects at Black Oaks on the Savanna

The following are projects that we are currently working on. If you would like to come on out and join us/help, please do.

Build a tool shed

Finish the deck for the yurt

No till permaculture beds

Put up the greenhouse with solar panels

Complete the cabin

The Biodegradable Bowl

The area around the cabin is like an empty bowl in need of fill in. We had planned to get soil to fill it in but we thought it would be a great experience for the children to experience first hand the breaking down of paper, cardboard and other biodegradable materials into soil. Please bring old yellow and white pages, newspapers, magazines, cardboard etc to fill up the biodegradable bowl Note: NO PLASTICS, FOIL, STYROFOAM OR METALS!!!! These are recycle materials , NOT biodegradable.

Repair and tap shallow wells

Gate and fence entrance

Put up sign and permaculture garden at the entrance.

Care for the Black Oaks : Removing all debris, dead trees and branches to reduce the risk of fires.

Complete the collective space, zone 1

Ways to Power Down: An Energy Descent

Become conscious of what the world gives so that you may have. The U.S. citizens are only 5% of the world population and yet, they expend over 25% of the world's fossil fuels.

Be evermore conscious of how you use energy; your own, others, money, nature and fossil fuels. Honor it's sacredness and treat it as such.

Learn about sustainable, renewable sources of energy (solar, geothermal, wind, bio-diesel).

Learn organic gardening/permaculture to feed yourself and others.

Learn survival wilderness training.

Create a circle of people to learn and experience more about how to power down and achieve a sustainable renewable lifestyle.

Make your home more energy efficient.

Buy local! Consciously develop local economics from manufacturing to retail.

Buy less, period!...Save more!

Use collective and public transportation as much as possible. Ride a bike, walk or skate to your destinations whenever you can.

Minimize the use of lighting and electrical appliances whenever possible.

Purchase a fuel efficient vehicle.

Convert or purchase a car that uses alternative energy (alcohol or bio-diesel).

Turn off the television and get into real life and relationships.

Go within to see what inner, personal changes you will have to make to live a sustainable renewable lifestyle that embraces cooperation, collectivism

To Learn More About Resource Depletion & Climate Change

Books

Beyond Oil: The Threat to Food & Fuel in the Coming Decades, J. Gevaar, R. Kaufman, D. Skole, C. Vorosmarty, 1986

The Party's Over: Oil, War and the Fate of Industrial Societies, R. Heinberg, 2003

High Noon for Natural Gas, J. Darley, 2004

Powerdown: Option and Actions for a Post-Carbon World, R. Heinberg, 2004

The End of Fossil Energy: And a Plan for Sustainability, J. Howe, 2004

The Long Emergency: Surviving the End of the Oil Age, Climate Change..., J. Kuntzler,

The Post-Petroleum Survival Guide & Cookbook, A. Bates 2006

Plan B 2.0: Rescuing a Planet under Stress and Civilization in Trouble, L. Brown, 2006

An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming & What We Can Do About It, Al Gore, 2006

The Oil Depletion Protocol: A Plan to Avert Oil Wars, Terrorism & Economic Collapse, R. Heinberg, 2006

Articles

The 4th Assessment Report U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2007

Websites

www.communitysolution.org

www.museletter.com

www.postcarbon.org

www.energybulletin.net

www.globalpublicmedia.com

www.permacultureactivist.org

www.landinstitute.org

www.earth-policyinstitute.org

www.realclimate.org

www.centerforfoodsafety.org

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*A clearing for transitioning to a
post carbon world*

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The mission of the Black Oaks Center for Sustainable Renewable Living is to heighten African Americans awareness of resource depletion and our dependency on fossil fuels. Trainings in energy conservation, energy efficient housing, permaculture, renewable energies and survival wilderness trainings are offered to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels as well as production of CO2 emissions. Experiences in being collective and team building are fostered to transform attitudes of individuality into one with the best interest of everyone in heart and mind. Our vision is to create a life boat full of families who have mastered the skills of sustainability that will assist our people and humanity in successfully transitioning to a post carbon world

E-WALES

E-Energy

To conserve and efficiently utilize all sources of energy, in every aspect of our lives including: housing, transportation, heating, cooling, our day to day activities and our own personal energy. To learn skills of reducing energy consumption and diversifying energy use including the use of renewable energies such as solar and wind in addition to fossil fuels.

W-Water

To conserve water in our daily lives. To do what is necessary personally and collectively in community to contribute to cleansing our water supplies of pollutants.

A-Air

To personally and collectively alter our day to day activities to contribute to significant reductions in CO2 emissions and other harmful air pollutants.

We as African Americans have a God given right to live, work, play, learn and worship in a healthy environment, sustainably. We as have a responsibility to do all that we can personally and collectively to revitalize our communities, to care for and utilize the life sustaining resources of energy, water, air and land (the earth) wisely. Doing so side by side with other communities, will secure present and future resources for our children.

L-Land

To reconnect our communities to the land, nature, the Earth. To do what is necessary to care for the Earth to rid it of harmful pollutants and to work with the Earth to feed our communities. To ensure food security and safety for our families. To live in beauty and balance

E-Economic Relocalization

In reducing our energy consumption and acting responsibly in our environment, we commit to building local economies with and for our children. To be producers of goods and services. To learn skills of self sufficiency.

S-Sustainability

As the San Kofa bird returns and fetches, we acknowledge our Ancient Ancestors who mastered living in balance and harmony with nature. We call upon the higher aspects of ourselves to embrace neighborliness over competition as we live for the greater good of our communities, not individualism. In the transformation of ourselves and our relationships we will in unity, transform the quality of our lives and the quality of our environment. We commit to live the highest expression of our humanity in the face of resource depletion and climate change.