

The Leaves of Twin Oaks

NEWS OF THE OAKS

by Valerie

What's a commune to do when a number of their musical instruments are stolen from the music room? Our answer: use the remaining instruments to hold a **Benefit Concert** to raise funds to replace the ones gone missing! Six different acts performed to a packed house at a local live-music venue (owned by an ex-member), and donations totaled just over \$1,000. The acts included Oakers performing klezmer music, covers of the Grateful Dead, our all-women's barbershop quartet, belly-dancing and more. We're grateful to everyone who chipped in to help keep the music flowing into the future.

Despite an unseasonably warm winter, we've found various cozy activities to keep us occupied. We currently have a **Philosophy Study Group**, a **Latin-language Study Group**, and a Sunday afternoon "**Young Adult Fantasy Read-Aloud and Knitting (And Other Crafts)**" group. So far they've gone through all 3 books in the Philip Pullman "His Dark Materials" trilogy, and are working on Susan Cooper's "The Dark is Rising" series. We've also revived **Dungeons and Dragons**, which hasn't been seen here since the 90's. Our new DM has been hosting a game, and every other Saturday night finds various Oakers out on adventures, gaining experience points, and helping build our "geek-chic" reputation.



One of our members has been keeping busy in a more solo pursuit. **Pam**, our long-time Garden Manager, has been hard at work in the final stages of editing her book, *Sustainable Market Farming: Intensive Vegetable Production on a Few Acres*. The focus is educating people about how to grow food for a large number of people, using only a few acres of land, which is exactly what Pam and our intrepid Garden Crew do each year for the approximately 100 people who live here. The book draws on the work Pam has done writing articles for "Growing for Market", a national magazine about market gardening, and will be published by New Society Publishers this autumn.

Another way in which we are revamping the past is that we have brought back "**satellite shops**" for our hammocks business. We did so well at the annual Casual Furniture Trade Show last fall, and garnered so many new accounts, that we now have more hammocks to make that we had planned for! And so we have engaged two of the other communities in Louisa County, and they have begun to make some of those hammocks for us, so that the hammocks will be ready to go by the required ship-date.

Other Random News of the Commune: Our group home-schooling project aka "**Unicorns**" (featured in a previous issue of the Leaves), just celebrated it's one year anniversary and is ramping up to 5 days a week. Earthquake repairs continue slowly but surely. The 10 kilo-watt array of **solar panels** we installed in 2010 is performing well—it provides power for 3 buildings and our community well house, and additional energy is channeled into the mainstream / corporate grid. We save over \$2000 each year in offset energy costs, and also we earn about \$1500 each year in solar energy credits.



And finally — *Save These Dates!* You are cordially invited to participate in our annual events:

Aug. 17 – 19: Twin Oaks Women's Gathering:

Celebrating Ourselves and Our Strength in Community: Workshops, Yoga, Song, Dance, DIY, Sweats, Empowerment, Creativity, Drumming, Sharing and Laughter! www.womensgathering.org

Aug. 31 – Sep. 3: Twin Oaks Communities Conference:

This Labor Day weekend, join us for workshops, community-building and culture creation. We'll explore topics such as group decision-making, intentional relationships and sustainable living. We welcome community seekers and members alike. Register now for early bird savings!

www.communitiesconference.org



INSIDE THIS ISSUE:	
Truth and Fiction	2
More Than a Place to Sit	3
The Longest Dirt Road	4
Community Connections	4

Truth and Fiction Can Both Be Strange:

A Cultural Reality Check

by Valerie

It's said that it's a sign of a well-developed sense of Self when you can laugh at your own quirks and foibles. Perhaps this is as true for a community as it is for an individual. Here, as with any sub-culture, stereotypes abound, and sometimes they're actually or at least partially based in reality. Even we roll our eyes at times....

Some of the statements below are true at Twin Oaks, and some are made up—see if you can distinguish fact from fiction (answers provided):

True or False -

A) We've had members named Bucket, Bok Choy and Free Radical—Twin Oaks is a social experiment, and as part of that, members are free to experiment with any name they like.

B) We have a publicly-posted menstrual calendar--all menstruating women can write their name in each month and track their cycle.

C) We have a Tree Sanctuary—a portion of our 450 mostly-wooded acres that is purposefully set aside and no trees can be cut for firewood from that section of forest.

D) We have no cats or dogs as pets--our value of egalitarianism doesn't allow for one living being to own another living being.

E) We have a Nudity Policy that allows members to be naked, anywhere outdoors, during a thunderstorm.

F) We have a Saturday Tour Policy that requires men wearing a dress to explain themselves to the people on the tour.

G) We have a Housing Policy that requires every member to change bedrooms once a year, to overcome attachment to materialism.

H) We don't use diapers on our babies—instead we toilet train them with methods based on ones used by indigenous people.

(H) False, somewhat. While babies at Twin Oaks wear (generally cloth) diapers, some parents use Elimination Communication. This is a practice of "natural" toilet training which uses observation, sound cues and intuition to train the child to eliminate when encouraged (ie. when they're not wearing diapers), and is based on the methods of some earlier cultures.

(G) False. Members live in their room as long as they want. It's not uncommon for people to change rooms a few times, looking for a different size of room, or a change in social scene by moving to a different building.

(F) True. "Addressing The Dress", as we call it, is an effort to educate people about our alternative gender norms while at the same time acknowledging what might be an unusual sight for new people visiting us for the first time.

(E) False, sort of. This was true in our former Nudity Policy, but was left out when we updated the policy a few years ago.

(D) False. Our Pet Policy allows for a limited number of cats and dogs to live here as pets.

(C) False. Each year, we selectively cut storm-damaged or over-crowded trees from different sections of our forest, rotating sections over the years. We do have about 10 acres that are difficult to access, so we generally don't harvest from there, but that section is not formally designated as a Sanctuary.

(B) True. Each year, a member hand-makes a beautifully-decorated Collective Menstrual Calendar, correlated with the moon phases, with space for women to write in their name on the day their period starts. The calendar is posted in the bathroom in the dining hall.

(A) True. We've also had Winter, Summer and Autumn; Bubble Fiddle, Ghost, and Sunshine Chap (1 person, 3 different names over time), Lotus Vortex, Delicious, Lady Stardust, and a member named "Name";

Answers:

More Than A Place To Sit

by Brittany

In kitchens and living rooms across the community, the rickety store-bought chairs of earlier decades are disappearing, and original creations, from rough log bench to delicate Windsor, are taking their places. Ten-year member Purl is behind this change. His first experience with the craft of chair-making came from repairing a commercial chair. The experience was satisfying—until the chair broke again. Factory made. Purl thought he could do better.

“How hard could it be to make a chair? It’s just four legs and a back and a seat. That ignorance and a willingness to make crap kept me going.”

And he has kept going. He spends a great deal of his free time in the woodshop cutting, shaving, chiseling, and weaving. And while he has attended two out-of-state chair schools to refine his craft, he is mostly self-taught. “Real woodworkers would think that what I am doing is just silly,” he remembers thinking at first. “I’ve gotten over that.” Now he teaches his craft to other community members and gives public demonstrations on and off the farm, including at Monticello.

The craft itself reinforces the community’s values. One is sustainability: Often the wood itself comes from our forestry program, or it is scrap from our hammocks business. Purl uses mostly hand tools rather than power tools, reducing his dependence on nuclear energy. Another value at Twin Oaks is



community. With the quiet and clean precision of hand tools, Purl can carry on a conversation while working or attend the Read Aloud and Knitting group with his project; no cloud of sawdust or scream of an electric motor interfere. He speaks often of his admiration for the Shakers, an American Christian sect founded in the eighteenth century. Perhaps best known for their work ethic and communal living, the Shakers’ resourcefulness and tendency to craft material goods to last demonstrated their devotion to each other. So Purl adds understated details to his work—a hand carved scroll, or a horse-shoe—to show the unknown future occupant that this work was done by a person, here, in this community.

“Human hands made this, which I think appeals to people. It appeals to me. We have so little of that now.” Keeping these crafts alive, insists Purl, “preserves pieces of our culture, craft, history—all different pieces of our humanity.” ❁

The Longest Dirt Road

by Tony

I hiked the Appalachian Trail in 2009 and then joined Twin Oaks. Even while on the A.T., a 2000 miler is relatively rare and often enjoys a sort of celebrity status. Off the trail, most people don't know that the term "thru-hiker" means someone who is hiking the whole trail--Maine to Georgia.

But here at Twin Oaks, three of us have hiked the whole trail. Twin Oakers are therefore 1,000 times more likely to have hiked the A.T. than the average American! Additionally, we have three others on the farm who have hiked over half of the trail, and dozens more who have hiked portions of it. Why does this connection exist?

A fun, anecdotal similarity is the fact that both Oakers and hikers sometimes acquire new and often colorful names. Here on the farm, we have Sunshine, Firefly, Summer, etc. A notable difference is that on the trail, one usually does not choose a name but is assigned one. For example, my name was bestowed upon me after I missed a fork in the trail and walked an unnecessary two miles over miserable terrain, then angrily constructed what was deemed by my cohorts an impressive six foot rock cairn - no one will ever miss that turn again. I was therefore dubbed "Mason." You might use your imagination to divine how the other five Oakers who contributed to this article got their names: Ezra became Staggerin' Willie; Aubby, Cayenne; Edmund, Cherokee Tears; Elsa, Black Eyed E; and the always-serene Brittany, Bar Fight.



Day One - Maine

But why are we all living on a commune? When we talked about it, these were some of the notable thoughts: The A.T. is also a community of equals, "We all hike the same miles." The trail is a "linear community" with wonderful people, hikers and also hundreds of trail maintainers and bunkhouse operators. Most hikers walk alone, but eat meals together at the shelters along the trail.

Mostly, I believe, the A.T. and Twin Oaks both offer an alternative to commercialism. My moment of clarity came when I stood at a New Hampshire overlook, happier and healthier than I'd ever been. I smiled and became conscious of just how close I felt to nirvana, and also that all I had, materially, was my gear and the clothes on my back, yet I wanted nothing.

I suspect that the biggest reason for the overlap of my two favorite communities is that we are the lucky few who recognize that the meaning of life is not for sale. ❄️



Icy beard - first day in the Smokies

Other Community Connections

We are connected to a few other communities who are currently seeking new members.

We encourage you take a look at any of these if they are potentially of interest to you.

The Midden (Columbus, Ohio): We are building a life together around the principles of egalitarianism, sustainability, accountability, justice, and cooperation. We're a group of six, experiencing the rewards and roadblocks of a young egalitarian community - property ownership, building cultural norms, etc. (themidden.wordpress.com)

Camphill Soltane (near Philadelphia): We have openings for community members (particularly male volunteers) who wish to live and work with individuals with developmental disabilities. We have an emphasis on

sustainable living, and foster an active cultural and spiritual life for community members. (www.camphillsoltane.org)

Ganas (Staten Island, NY): We are an urban community that has been going for over 30 years. We focus on problem solving and sharing resources as foundations for a strong and sustainable community. We are looking for people interested in working in our second hand furniture store (someone strong) or our thrift and vintage clothing store. (www.ganas.org)