Summer is a time of ABUNDANCE and we've got it. We have an abundance of...

...talent, at our latest Visitor Group Talent Show. Highlights included contortionism, a memorized recitation of pi to over 100 places and performances on the banjo and auto-harp.

...sweet potatoes. We have a surplus from the last harvest that we are donating to the food bank near us.

...Hipster Disney Princesses, at our recent party of that name, featuring multiple sexy-geeky black glasses frames.

...women, at our “Evening Under The Stars,” an all-women campfire evening which was 2-year-old Sylvia's first camp-out!

...privilege? The issue of privilege has been the topic of an on-going community discussion this summer. We had more than one community meeting around this issue, including one with small-group sharing about questions such as “How did or didn't you experience privilege growing up?” “How has this changed, or not, since moving to Twin Oaks?” The article Straight White Male: The Lowest Difficulty Setting There Is (whatever.scalzi.com/2012/05/15/straight-white-male-the-lowest-difficulty-setting-there-is)) was one of the starting points of the discussion.

….ex-members, who came for our 48th Anniversary Celebration. We enjoyed our in-house Grateful Dead cover band, lots of toddlers visiting with their ex-member parents, and a dance party in the evening.
One of the main reasons I moved to Twin Oaks, way back in 1999, when I was 19 years old, was because I thought it would be a good place to learn. Being able to try out a wide variety of jobs, and the opportunities to learn skills that might otherwise be hard to access in the mainstream, are big benefits to living at Twin Oaks.

As a new member I joined the management team for the Tofu business. I got involved with organizing the Communities Conference, did work for Recruiting, and became one of the community’s delegates to the Federation of Egalitarian Communities (FEC). I also joined the Process Team and worked on community process, conflict resolution, and policy development. Eventually I did a stint on the Board of Planners and learned about budgeting and the economics of the community.

I recently took on a new job, which, in retrospect, I’ve been training for my whole life. I am now the incoming Executive Director for the Fellowship for Intentional Community (FIC), replacing Laird Schaub, who has been doing the job, and been central to the movement, for almost three decades (which is most of my life).

In addition to the work I’ve done at Twin Oaks, I helped start and run two small co-operative businesses when I took a break from Twin Oaks and lived in Charlottesville, VA for 4 years. I also helped organize for a variety of community-oriented projects. Before I moved to Twin Oaks I lived in a student housing co-operative, and was part of a group that helped keep that house from getting shut down. I’ve also visited dozens of different communities over the years.

As I write this, I’m on my way to Findhorn Ecovillage in Scotland, where I’ll be attending the 20th anniversary summit of the Global Ecovillage Network (GEN). The FIC has been in dialog with other organizations connected with GEN about being part of the North American network of GEN, and myself along with Christopher Kindig, the FIC Business Manager, will be attending this event as part of the group of 10 North American delegates.

I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t a little terrified by all this. On the one hand, this role plays perfectly into my skill set and personality, and everyone seems to think I’ll do a great job. On the other hand, it’s a bigger chunk of responsibility than anything I’ve ever taken on and puts me center stage in the communities movement, and makes me more of a player in the larger cooperative movement. But this is what my life has been about. I’m excited and determined to do everything I can to grow the movement.
We built the dome two weeks ago. It took a morning of nuts, bolts, and diagrams, but the metal skeleton finally emerged. Easily twenty feet tall, it stands in a clearing on Twin Oaks property, waiting for the annual Women’s Gathering, when it will serve as a home for discussion and celebration. Over one hundred women meet here each summer for a weekend of community and empowerment.

The Gathering organizers are so excited for this year’s event. We already have some great workshops lined up, on topics from sustainable living to sacred chant. Alina, one of our interns, has even talked about putting a rugby workshop together, so be sure to bring your sneakers!

This year’s Gathering, from August 21 – 23, is part of a long tradition. For 31 years, Twin Oaks has hosted the Women’s Gathering, a chance for women to come together and spend time “Celebrating Ourselves, Our Creativity, and Our Strength!” In addition to the workshops, there will be performances and plenty of free time to dance, star-gaze, practice yoga, meet new people, and get dirty in our famous mud pit. Valerie wrote about her experiences, and recalled last year’s atmosphere: “The evening ends with an amazing outdoor dance party, accompanied by some drummers around the campfire.”

For many of our attendees, the Gathering is a spiritual experience, a space where they can find community with other women. Brittany, one of the Gathering’s organizers, wrote about her experiences. “The understanding of what women’s community gifts us can be intense, punctuated by tears gleaming on a woman’s cheeks or a fire burning in her eyes,” she wrote. “You see she is changed.”

So, how can you be a part of this year’s Women’s Gathering? Join us by registering online at womens-gathering.org. If you have a talent, we’re still accepting proposals for workshops and performances. You can also take the spotlight by performing on our Sharing Stage, where women sing, dance, and recite poetry. Whatever your gifts are, we want to see them! The Gathering is open to all who are female-born and/or woman-identified. The fee for the weekend is $85, but a sliding scale and work exchange are available. All girls, and boys 6 and under, are welcome to attend, and childcare is cooperative. If you have questions or are interested in volunteering, please write to us at gathering@twinoaks.org.

We hope to see you this year. The sense of community created in only three days is truly incredible, and something every woman should have the chance to experience.

To register, go to twinoakscommunity.org/more-pages/events-twinoaks-81/women-womyn-gathering
This Labor Day weekend, the participants of Twin Oaks Communities Conference will pitch their tents in the woods by the conference site, with its outdoor kitchen, shower and toilet facilities, and a hiking trail that slips right into the river. It will be a community-centered extravaganza. The bonfire is waiting, and you can expect the dance party.

Participants will choose from a variety of workshops, including “+20 Fishbowl Discussion,” where older communities share their perspectives and stories; “New Kids on the Block,” an introduction to communities under five years old; and the natural synthesis of both perspectives, “State of the Movement.” There will be scheduled tours of Twin Oaks and Acorn communities and an Open Space section of the weekend, where participants can offer their own workshops, discussions, or activities.

This year’s Monday Program – Money in Community – lends itself to alliteration and challenging conversation. There are three tracks (Nonprofit, New Models Track, and the Business Track) that work to unpack the nitty-gritty how-to, delve into the complex relationships and emotions tangled in money, and to empower participants to cultivate greater ease with money.

The Communities Conference partnered with EarthDeeds for a carbon onsetting program, which aims to neutralize the carbon footprint of participants travel to the conference by donating to sustainability projects. Money will be donated to projects as voted by our participants. For more information: earthdeeds.org/team.php?teamid=122.

Registration is open at communitiesconference.org/register. Indoor accommodations are available. Unfortunately, because of the terrain, the conference site is not easily accessible to those with limited mobility. Folks with limited mobility interested in attending the conference are encouraged to contact conference facilitators. More information can be found at: communitiesconference.org.