We had two successful conferences this summer! The **Women's Gathering** and the **Communities Conference** each drew about 150 people, coming together for a weekend of sharing, learning and entertainment. The “woo” factor was raised by the women-only Crystal Bowl Toning Workshop for the Women's Gathering organizing group, and was enjoyed by all who toned. After those events ended, we bid adieu to the Conference Interns, and said hello to our new **Chair-Making Intern**, who came all the way from Denmark to work with Purl in his hand-tooled wood-working shop.

Rather it is fed back into our regional power grid, and we receive a corresponding reduction on our power bill, as well as payment for selling power to other states to meet their legal requirements for green energy production.

Also, several members have found an outlet for their creative energies via our **Twin Oaks Community Etsy** page (etsy.com/shop/TwinOaksCommunity).

We've also had an actual birth—beautiful baby **Tallulah** was born to Fox and Trout in mid-July.

Other recent on- and off-the-farm activities include an **Elton John sing-along** (Honky Chateau!) and a **Zine Discussion Group**, which has read zines on topics ranging from radical sobriety to the Occupy movement to lesbian separatism. In October, two carfuls of Oakers drove out to our sister community **Sandhill Farm** in Missouri to take part in their annual sorghum harvest (sorghum is an “old-timey” alternative to molasses that was commonly produced in the US during the early 1900's, which Sandhill sells as one of their income sources).
The Health Team (HTM) at Twin Oaks deals with issues that are vital to the community: birth, death, sex, and paperwork. Not necessarily in that order! Augie and Brittany, the two members of the team, will be the first to admit paperwork is often first on the agenda. That’s because they are the healthcare administrators for the entire community. If someone is preparing to give birth or just trying to lobby for more protein powder, Augie and Brittany manage the details.

“The job is important both in terms of making sure people’s health needs are met and doing so in a way that sees the big picture of how money is spent,” says Augie. When they aren’t filling out paperwork, the members of the HTM are busy here on the farm. During their tenure, Augie and Brittany have focused on accessibility, particularly for the elderly. Twin Oaks has had a Child Board for years, but Augie and Brittany facilitated the creation of an Elder Care Team. “Their labor is important,” Brittany says about the community’s older members. “Their social integration is important. Their physical integration—can they get around? They need advocates and I’m glad to have helped.” Almost one third of Twin Oakers are over the age of 50, which means they begin to draw pension hours, the first step towards retirement. As members get older, the HTM is also dealing with hospice care. When aging member Piper needed care, she lived in Appletree, a wheelchair-accessible, air-conditioned building. Since her death, Augie and Brittany have been thinking about accessibility in general. “We’ve got the Child Board that sees to the needs of children and families,” Brittany says. “I think there are many other groups that could use some devoted attention.”

So whether someone needs hospice care or just a new pair of glasses, Augie and Brittany deal with personal requests. They agree that HTM members need to find the “right balance between detachment and compassion,” since it’s impossible to satisfy everyone. For the members of the HTM this is a micro example of how Twin Oaks works as a whole; everyone has to find a solution that will be best for the community. “It’s not just about health. It’s about the compromises you have to make so that community is sustainable,” say Augie.
Personal Relationships: “Legal marriage, lifelong monogamy, and celibacy are not dominant patterns of relationships at Twin Oaks, although we do have some of all of those. Both serious relationships and casual sex are treated as normal and usual. ‘Coming out’ is a matter of interest mostly to those directly concerned. The usual pattern is pairing up and breaking up, with their attendant euphoria and misery. A frequent reason for breaking up is the temptation of an attractive third party. Thus I describe and dismiss, in two sentences, the most important thing that happens in most people’s lives, the events that take the most energy, cause the most membership turnover, most profoundly affect each individual’s future.”

The Communal Economy: “When I say that Twin Oaks has a fully communal economic system, I mean that we generate income almost entirely from on-premises activities, and all of that money goes into a communal bank account. We are not employees and we get no wages. Instead the Community takes care of all our needs. By ‘all our needs’ I mean food, clothing, housing, medical and dental care, toiletries, furniture, automobiles and trucks, recreation and a dozen other things. I do not mean ‘all our wants’, which is different. The Community buys food, but not candy. It does not buy cigarettes or booze. It does not pay for much vacation travel. The Community reserves the right to determine what is and is not a ‘need’, and this will vary according to our income. In spite of these exceptions, I consider that we have complete social security within the Community.”

Decision-Making by The Planners: “The biggest part of a Planner’s job is administrative—gathering input and analyzing it, expressing the group’s will if and when it can be determined.

In fact, one of the questions asked a prospective Planner is, ‘Do you have any agenda you would like to implement during your term?’ God help the poor innocent who answers, ‘yes’.

Why would anyone apply? There seem to be three main motives: 1) People who haven’t tried it yet and want the experience, for personal growth; 2) People who see the need sometimes take it on as a duty; 3) A few people actually enjoy the work.”

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