

EarthMatters

Inspiring people to take responsibility for Earth.

VOLUME 16, NUMBER 2

Winter 2009/10

NWEI News

NWEI Discovers a New Sense of Place!

In early December the NWEI staff said goodbye to its downtown location and moved across the river to the renovated Olympic Mills office building in inner Southeast Portland. While we'll miss the view of Mt. Hood and our favorite food carts, we're excited about our new location.

Once a flour mill producing Bisquick and Wheaties, the 1920s building has been renovated into a bright, creative, mixed-use space that includes offices, a restaurant and a coffee shop. The high ceilings and exposed pipes and beams create an open and spacious feeling in our office, despite it being smaller than our old space.

In many ways, this renovated old mill building reflects NWEI's own efforts to grow and adapt to a changing world while maintaining a solid foundation. The mix of old and new suggest a sense of history and possibility. The process of moving itself provided us with an opportunity to look

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Reconnecting with the Ecological Self

By Jeffrey Noethe, Ph.D.

The idea of an "ecological self" may sound confusing and even contradictory, but to me, it is simple shorthand for the aspect of self that is completely interconnected and interdependent with everything and everyone that surrounds us. We humans often feel small, separate, and powerless; but that is never the ultimate truth of our existence. The truth, if we can learn to see it, is that we are part of everything, never separate, and directly "plugged-in" to all the power of life and the universe. This doesn't mean we have super powers, but it does mean that we always have access to a wonderful resource for nurturing health and wellness.

As a Psychologist in private practice, my work frequently involves helping people reconnect with their ecological selves, even if I do not always use that language. More often, I simply talk about the value of connecting with self, others, and surroundings. Whenever I do an intake with a new client, in addition to asking about symptoms and

presenting concerns, I always ask about self-care, which I see as the foundation of a person's sense of connectedness. If this foundation is strong, then one may be better able to create and maintain a happy, healthy existence. On the other hand, if this foundation is weak in some way, then no amount of determination, personal reflection, or therapy may ever be enough to create real and lasting change.

When addressing self-care with clients, I ask questions about obvious behaviors such as nutrition, hydration, substance use, sleep, and exercise. However, I also ask questions like, "Do you make time for fun or meaningful activities? Who is in your support system, and do you use them? Do you have any creative outlets? Do you place any value on getting out into nature? Do you grow anything? Do you have any pets?" Taken together, these self-care questions help me understand where a client's foundation is strong and where it may be weak. These questions also provide an opportunity to encourage

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MIKE'S MESSAGE

A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

By now most of you are aware that our latest discussion course, *Sustainable Systems at Work*, is directed at employees and their workplaces. Perhaps you are wondering if we have changed our focus and "gone corporate"? Maybe you've wondered if our strategy is to help companies sell new lines of green widgets? Or perhaps you think that NWEI is expanding to offer another effective method for realizing our mission and founding tenets. If you guessed the latter, you've won the jackpot!

NWEI maintains its conviction that an inspired, active citizenry is vital to the foundational change we need in order to shift from an industrial society to a sustainable society. In supporting this shift, we view our work through the frame of evolution in action-- staying relevant by adjusting as culture changes around us. At the same time, it is important for us to not only respond to change, but also anticipate future needs and have the right tools in place when they arise.

One of the needs just now being recognized by the business community is employee

engagement. Inspired employees are critical to moving sustainability beyond green teams, facility operations and marketing campaigns and into the realm of real innovation. Further, a new generation of employees entering the workforce, coined the "new millennials", are demanding alignment between the socially responsible values many of them hold and their work environment. To attract and retain a talented emerging work force, employers better be sure they are talking the talk and walking the walk! More seasoned employees also need to be inspired on the personal and professional levels if sustainability initiatives are to avoid the "flavor of the month" syndrome plaguing a high percentage of past business efforts.

Enter NWEI's *Sustainable Systems at Work*. The following quotes speak to the value of our work both for the workplace and its employees: "NWEI courses complement Starbucks' commitment to sustainability by enriching internal discussions and giving participants a clear understanding of their direct role

in the conservation of natural resources. As a result, these individuals are better equipped to assess environmental issues and embrace innovative solutions in the workplace and in their personal lives. We highly recommend NWEI programs to organizations that believe in driving change from the inside-out," Ben Packard, Vice President, Corporate Social Responsibility, Starbucks. NWEI course participant Roy Swart says, "Participating in NWEI courses has changed who I am. Sometimes it's hard to actually make a life-changing commitment based on the new ideas you've encountered, but it's easier to take that step when you know others are taking it with you. I feel like I am a stronger global community member as a result of the thinking, discussing, and acting that the NWEI courses facilitate."

A whole lot of "changed" Roy Swart's in the work place and in our communities might just provide the leverage needed to shift our culture in the direction we aspire to!

For us and the planet,
Mike Mercer

A special thanks to our 2009 EcoChallengers!

The first annual NWEI EcoChallenge was a huge success thanks to our team of EcoChallengers! Many thanks to the following people* for taking on the Challenge with gusto, and helping us raise over \$21,000 for NWEI's programs!

Monique Baillargeon	Carrie Farrar	Deborah McNamara	Doug Rich	Linda Wolff
Jon Blumenauer	Narada Golden	Sarah Menzies	Kate Rinder	Pat Wolter
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Dani Dennenberg	Beatrice Hedlund	Steve Mital	Carly Schmidt	EcoChallenge
Kelly DiNorcia	Elise Lind	Rick North	Olive Smith	participants who
Catherine Eastman	Kerry Lyles	Meg O'Brien	Laura Vincent	raised \$40 or more
Valerie Esposito	Maggie & Chuck Maggio	Victoria Pich	Gretchen Washington	during the event

small changes that might have a significant impact on the progress of therapy. For example, in addition to attending therapy on a weekly basis, a client may agree to work on eating better, exercising, utilizing supports, or getting outside more regularly. These changes not only help the client feel better physically, but they also tend to enhance the client's sense of self-efficacy and confidence.

It rarely surprises anyone when I suggest that getting out into nature is an important aspect of self-care. In the same way that sleep and exercise are important to our well-being, so too is having a sense of connectedness with the real world around us. After all, we are born of the earth (like all creatures) and live in a constant state of interconnectedness and interdependence, whether we realize it or not. When we are aware of that connectedness, we tend to feel more solid, stable, and secure. We tend to feel more real ourselves, just as we do when we connect more deeply with ourselves and others. With these feelings comes the possibility of symptom relief, especially in the areas of anxiety and depression. Improving a client's sense of connectedness will not necessarily cure or even reduce symptoms, but I believe that ignoring connectedness will always make such changes more challenging than they need to be. Time and again, I have seen the healing effects of improved self-care, and on several occasions, I have seen symptom relief so profound that professional help was no longer needed.

Clients don't always understand that connecting with nature does not require moving to the country, hiking through the wilderness, or sleeping in a tent. It can happen at any time and in any place. Our homes may have yards, trees, gardens, houseplants, or pets. The busiest city street has plants, wildlife, terrain, an ecosystem, a watershed, and weather. We only have to learn to slow

down, be present, and notice them. Even nurturing our human relationships and communities can enhance our sense of connectedness to nature. Despite modern trends toward individualism and isolation, we are essentially social creatures, and our deepest capacities for empathy, compassion, communication, and love allow us to resonate more deeply with the natural world. This is every bit as true in urban settings as it is in rural settings.

The next time you catch yourself getting wound up in the hustle and bustle of modern life, try the following exercise, which I often assign as homework for clients. It creates an opportunity to slow down and reconnect with yourself and everything around you. It also draws you into the present moment and encourages non-judgmental awareness.

Scan-Scan-Breathe Exercise

1. Stop for a moment and notice your surroundings using all of your senses. Ask yourself, "What's going on around me right now?" Notice the colors, textures, sounds, and odors; and try to do so with calm, non-judgmental curiosity. Try to tune into the deeper world behind what you are seeing. Notice the terrain, the weather, and any evidence of life, no matter how small or subtle. (Don't forget that noticing life means noticing people, too!) Notice the ecosystem and the watershed, both as they are now and how they might once have been.

2. Once you've scanned the external world, try to notice the world within by paying attention to the messages of your body. Ask yourself, "What's going on inside me right now?" Notice if you are hungry, full, hot, cold, tired, sore, tense, or relaxed. Notice any body sensations, pleasant or unpleasant, and treat them all with that same calm, non-judgmental curiosity. Notice the activity of your thoughts and feelings.

3. Finally, turn your attention to your breath. Notice what it feels like to breathe. After you've watched a few breaths, try to slow and deepen your breathing. As you do so, notice any changes in your mental or physical state.

The secret to getting the most out of this exercise is finding a frequent and effective reminder to practice at seemingly random moments throughout the day. (The hourly chime of a digital watch is ideal.) With a little practice, this exercise can be done quickly and at any moment, even when you are driving, working, or engaged in a conversation. It is a way of "tuning in" to the vivid world of which you are a part.

Eventually, my hope is that you will find the exercise largely unnecessary, because you will start to live in a state of greater connectedness. For me, this is what it means to reconnect with your ecological self. ■

[Jeffrey Noethe, Ph.D.](http://www.DrNoethe.com) is a practicing Psychologist who lives and works in Portland, Oregon. He can be reached at www.DrNoethe.com or (503) 730-1594.

MANY THANKS!

NWEI thanks the following businesses for their recent generous donations:

Burgerville
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Laughing Planet Café
REI

EcoChallenge Insights

By Emily West

My journey with food awareness began seven years ago. I wanted to be healthier, so I started with simple things like eating whole grains, more vegetables, fruits, and less red meat. Slowly, my eyes were opened to the current system of food processing and consumption.

When my son was born, he had many food allergies, including an allergy to preservatives. This motivated me to learn more about the additives, chemicals, and GMOs that are in our food. This is when we switched to eating mostly organic whole foods in our family.

This past fall I took my food awareness to a new level when I chose a “100 mile diet” for my NWEI EcoChallenge. Eating locally really aligned with my values, so I decided to make that my personal challenge. While reading ingredients had become second nature to me, I wasn’t trained to ask where my food was *from*.

I’ve always enjoyed shopping at farmers markets, but unfortunately those trips became harder to make with small children. Instead, I resorted to seeing how quickly I could get in and out of the grocery store. I still grabbed organic whole foods, but didn’t pay attention to where they originated. I hoped my EcoChallenge would teach me new things, and force me to slow down and consider all aspects of the food my family was eating.

During the two-week EcoChallenge I had many “aha” moments. The first week, I found myself looking for local rice... umm... rice? Grown in Oregon? The learning began. I giggled in the grocery store aisle and luckily caught myself before asking someone to help me locate the local rice section.

So rice was eliminated from our diets for the two weeks of the



EcoChallenge—this was a challenge for my family in and of itself. I managed to find local pastas but they were outside of our food budget, so I made my own. I also found that local eggs are yummy but expensive too. Local potatoes on the other hand are inexpensive, unless you want them organic, in which case they can be expensive too. Fortunately, we have a good size organic garden which supplied most of our veggies during the EcoChallenge. My children thrived picking and watering our vegetable garden.

A few nights into the EcoChallenge I found myself putting non-local condiments on my food without even thinking about it, proving that eating locally was a lot tougher than I thought. We found a few local meats we could afford—chicken and salmon but shrimp was out (too expensive), and without the rice and beloved teriyaki sauce from afar, dinner just wasn’t the same. Local wine is widely available, but less affordable—and I missed my “two buck Chuck”.

I wanted so badly to do the EcoChallenge perfectly and proudly. I thought I was really good at the non-packaged whole foods thing, but I realized I was hooked on products that weren’t local, or environmentally friendly, and possibly even from companies that mistreat their workers. How did I get so far away from the basics? When did it become the norm



to have corn in December, strawberries in January, and bananas every day of the week? I was a consumer just like the rest of them and it made me a little sad.

I hope that eating mostly local foods for those two weeks provided some additional support for local dairy farmers and agriculture farms. I hope that less fuel was used to transport and process the foods that I chose for those two weeks. I wouldn’t begin to know how to measure the numeric benefits of my EcoChallenge. What I can measure is the impact the EcoChallenge had on my personal food choices. My awareness of what I buy, and when I buy it, has noticeably increased. I value local growers and food producers more. I also realized that when it comes to continuing to buy locally, cost is the biggest issue for my family. Maybe if we all decided to buy local, then the costs would go down, but old habits die hard.

Thanks to NWEI’s EcoChallenge, I plan to continue buying more local, seasonal foods and fewer long distance, processed foods. I will continue to look for a local rice grower! Mostly, I will continue to focus on improving myself and my habits on behalf of the Earth. ■

Emily West is a wife, mother of two young children, teacher and a volunteer for NWEI who lives in Portland, Oregon.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

Many thanks to all of our donors and members who contributed to NWEI in recent months!

The following donors contributed at the Earth Steward (\$100) level or higher:

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These donations were received between 7/21/2009 and 12/15/2009

Expanding Our Reach through EarthShare's Website

In our fast-paced electronic society, getting out the message about our work takes a little technical savvy, some great photos and a good menu – in short, a website.

The Northwest Earth Institute has an improved tool in our communications toolbox. As a member of EarthShare of Oregon, we are able to provide valuable information about our programs to a broader audience with a convenient click on www.earthshare-oregon.org.

EarthShare of Oregon's website offers useful information for a variety of visitors. If you are a donor to the Northwest Earth Institute and/or other environmental groups, you can learn more about how we and other members of EarthShare invest your contributions. If you want to get outdoors or attend an event, you can visit the site to see upcoming activities and events happening in the broader environmental community. Or perhaps you're interested in volunteering—EarthShare includes volunteer opportunities with their 35 environmental and conservation groups all over Oregon.

Do you want to make a donation? You can do that at the EarthShare website too. Or you can read about how to lead a giving campaign at your place of work, and then contact the EarthShare staff to get started.

To get up-to-date news about environmental issues, subscribe to EarthShare's electronic newsletter or just peruse the list of conservation groups and see all of the amazing work they are doing to keep people healthy, preserve wildlife habitat and reduce global warming. Check out the website at www.earthshare-oregon.org. ■

Knowing Your Place: Southwestern Water

The Flows That Bind Us



By *Stephanie Moret*

Southwesterners are bonded by our recognition that water is a precious and scarce resource. Our climate ranges from semi-arid in the north, arid in the central and southern regions, to Mediterranean along the Southern California coast. As a people, we share common stories shaped by our reverence of water, by living with a dynamic hydrologic regime, and by the successes and failures of our forebearers to reshape an arid landscape to include water. The complex system of physical, biological, and social interactions influencing water resources has modified our fragile western ecosystems, where recovery from degradation can take hundreds to thousands of years; and where expectations of what is 'normal' change with each generation.

In spite of the parched surface that constitutes much of our region, our mountains are blessed with precipitation; and, beneath us, water that has percolated through the land

for millennia moves through vast underground aquifers. While we may only get a few inches of rainfall each year, it often comes all at once, prompting both disaster warnings and gratitude that our reservoirs and aquifers will be partly replenished and another drought staved off. Our civilization has been created by harnessing mountain streams behind dams, pumping our limited groundwater, and conveying these waters vast distances to support expanding populations.

Mark Twain is believed to have penned the West's signature quote, "Whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting over." The original brawls over agricultural water rights have evolved into legal challenges to balance the needs of agriculture, industry, development, and natural habitat while maintaining a clean, sustainable water source. As we realize that many of our successes in controlling water have resulted in environmental losses,

Westerners' actions, as individuals and as a society, are beginning to focus on understanding and working with the natural system to capture, store, and safely release water to mimic natural processes as best we can.

Water awareness is a conscious and evolving dynamic in Southwesterner's lives because our lifestyles accommodate a landscape that is characterized by drought, flood, and fire—and an ecosystem that has evolved to adapt to these conditions. We revere water bodies as our gathering places, be they lakes, reservoirs, rivers, oceans, or swimming pools. We share food with friends amidst the sound of splashing as we seek respite from the heat with a cool, delicious dip. For many of us, our natural water holes are dry by June. My childhood friends and I would rescue tadpoles from the same drying streams that we built dams and swimming holes in during the spring; and then watched swell in the winter, muddy and laden with scoured vegetation.

Water-wise Southwesterners carry water on their person, conserve water in their homes, plant drought-tolerant landscapes, and know that a storm in distant mountains can ravage a sunny plateau in seconds, easily filling an arroyo or a graffitied storm channel. We are aware that we live in a dynamic landscape and that our ability to control Western water is tenuous. Perhaps because of this, water is our common bond. ■

[Stephanie Moret lives and works in Santa Barbara and leads the Pacific Earth Institute.](#)

NWEI's Network of Sister & Affiliate Organizations

NWEI currently has 21 "Sister" Earth Institutes and Affiliate Organizations. See this list to locate an affiliate organization in your neck of the woods:

Alaska Earth Institute

Anchorage AK
akearth@alaska.net

Arkansas Earth Institute

Little Rock, AR
www.arkansasearth.org

Be the Change Earth Institute

Vancouver, BC
www.bethechangeearthalliance.org

Canadian Earth Institute

Victoria, BC
www.canadianearthinstitute.org

Cincinnati Earth Institute

Cincinnati, OH
www.cinciearth.org

Coulee Partners for Sustainability

La Crosse, WI
www.cpslax.org

Earth Institute of West Michigan

Grand Rapids, MI
www.eiwestmichigan.org

Garden State Earth Institute

Morristown, NJ;
www.gsearthinstitute.org

Granite Earth Institute

Durham, NH
www.graniteearth.org

Great Lakes Earth Institute

Fredonia, WI; www.glei.org

Great Plains Earth Institute

Wichita, KS; www.gpei.org

Idaho Earth Institute

Boise, ID
www.idahoearth.org

Kentucky

Passionist Earth & Spirit

Center
Louisville, KY
bzangari@insightbb.com

Maine Earth Institute

Freedom, ME
www.maineearth.org

Pacific Earth Institute

Santa Barbara, CA
www.pacificearth.org

Rhode Island Earth Institute

Providence, RI
bekahjasmine@gmail.com

Rocky Mountain Earth Institute

Boulder, CO
deborah@nwei.org

Simplicity Matters Earth Institute

Keedysville, MD
www.simplicity-matters.org

Simply Living

Columbus, OH
www.simplyliving.org

Sustain Dane

Madison, WI
www.sustaindane.org

Utah Society for Environmental Education

Salt Lake City, UT
www.usee.org

NWEI News *continued from page 1*

back at where we came from and as we go forward, to think creatively about our place in the world. Our new address is 107 SE Washington Street, Suite 235, Portland, OR 97214. Stop in and say hi if you are in the neighborhood!

EcoChallenge 2009

Thanks to all of you who helped make this year's EcoChallenge a great success! Our EcoChallenge

participants and their generous supporters helped NWEI exceed its goal and raise over \$21,000 for our programs!

Whether you challenged yourself during the EcoChallenge or supported someone who did, your participation in the EcoChallenge made a difference on many levels! See page four for a story by one of the participants about her EcoChallenge experience.

Stay tuned for details about the 2010 EcoChallenge!

JOIN NWEI'S EFFORTS TO GREEN WORKPLACES!

Have you participated in NWEI's newest course, *Sustainable Systems at Work*, yet? The time is now! Gather a group of coworkers and be part of creating a more sustainable organization. Visit www.nwei.org for more information on *Sustainable Systems at Work*, or email deborah@nwei.org for help getting started. ■



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