

FORUM

A voice for peace, social justice and reform since 1917

The Capital Times Tuesday, Dec. 26, 2006 A7

Folks in North Woods teach us about sustainable living

STEVENS POINT — When it comes to sustainability, folks way up north are showing the way. The city of Bayfield recently became the latest “eco-city” in the north, adopting principles of sustainability to guide actions of government and community.

Mayor Larry MacDonald was interviewed about it on Air America’s “EcoTalk” program. Host Betsy Rosenberg asked him if this green activism trickled up from Madison.

“Actually, it trickled downward to Madison from here,” MacDonald said in his good-natured way.

Bayfield, the state’s smallest city with 611 people, joined the cities of Ashland and Washburn and the town of Bayfield in adopting sustainability guidelines. With any luck, other communities around Wisconsin will follow suit, and sustainability will creep into daily life like recycling did a few decades ago.

Some people get hung up in intellectual discussions all the time about what “sustainability” means. Up on Chequamegon Bay, they’re just doing it. Some examples:

■ Bayfield recently built a \$9 million state-of-the-art sewage treatment plant designed for “zero discharge” into Lake Superior. “They say you can drink what comes out of it, but I haven’t gone that far yet,” MacDonald says.

■ Ashland has successfully encouraged new businesses to be “eco-friendly,” using techniques like rain gardens to limit runoff.

■ Rural residents in the town of Bayfield are building innovative energy-efficient homes and devising ways to get off the electrical grid.

■ Area-wide, residents are buying local foods and beverages whenever possible. Restaurants are making a concerted effort to do this, says MacDonald.

MacDonald credits the tenacity of

Bill Berry



Mary Rehwald of Ashland and a group of people who formed the Alliance for Sustainability 14 years ago. The group has been steadfast in its efforts to educate and activate citizens and recently hired a full-time executive director.

The group sponsored an international sustainability conference that drew 200 participants to Ashland in 2005. They were exposed to the Natural Step scientific framework for sustainability pioneered in Sweden. Natural Step focuses on respect for biodiversity, concern about population growth and attention to resource consumption locally and beyond.

A group of eight area residents traveled to Sweden to see practices firsthand. More than a dozen local “study circles” then set out to learn more about the concept this year.

In short order, the Bayfield circle published a booklet called “Earth Care: Choose, Consume, Recycle — Living a Sensible Life in Bayfield.” It’s full of tips on how to do that, most of them simple ways to leave small footprints.

Rosenberg asked MacDonald whether it’s worth the effort to bother with small steps when big problems like the consequences of global warming are looming.

“Small steps add up in a hurry,” he responded. “We need to grab some low-hanging fruit, making little differences turn into big differences,

and eventually it will just be the way people do things.”

Northern Wisconsin communities are among the leaders in the sustainability movement, but they’re not alone. A diverse collection of groups in the St. Croix Valley in western Wisconsin has been holding community forums, conversations and art exhibits around the general theme of sustainability for several years. The project, called “What We Need Is Here,” blends a discussion on sustainability with the creativity of the arts.

Organizers have looked at issues such as watershed protection, land use, the changing rural landscape, developing social capital, and building community through the arts. Hundreds of people have attended forums in Hammond; Hudson; River Falls; Stillwater, Minn.; and other communities. An exhibit currently at the Phipps Center for the Arts in Hudson highlights these themes.

One of the forums this year focused on how to work with community and organizational leaders at the grass-roots level to develop skills needed to sustain vibrant neighborhoods and families. That’s good, old-fashioned citizen activism. The discussions are important to the future of western Wisconsin, where rapid urbanization from the Twin Cities has challenged people to think about what they want their communities and rural landscapes to be in the future.

Back up in Bayfield, MacDonald has a saying that goes like this, “Making Bayfield the way we like has been the slow and loving task of 150 years. To destroy the Bayfield that we know can take but the careless act of a single day.”

Sustainability, anyone?

Bill Berry of Stevens Point writes a semi-monthly column for The Capital Times. E-mail: billnick@charter.net

Voice of the People

Book shows Carter’s got a lot left in him

Dear Editor: I thought former President Jimmy Carter’s days were pretty well over, but after hearing him on “Meet the Press” with Tim Russert, I’ve come to the conclusion they’re not over yet. We are reading his new book, “Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid.” I’ve believed for some time now that the road to Baghdad is through Israel.

Carter probably should run for president again were it not for his age, as he was a one-term president. He probably could make a good vice president or secretary of state. I believe the reason we’re having so many wars — and I’ve said this before — is not respecting people’s property rights.

Like President Carter said, “This is something Israel will have to work out with Lebanon and the Palestinians first.” Then the issues of Iraq, and I believe oil, will fall in line along with Afghanistan.

Could you imagine, with all the money we borrowed from China (along with all the industry and technology we’ve taken over there), what would happen if they said they wanted their money back? With the financial condition this country is in, could we give them their money back or would they confiscate the industries we’ve

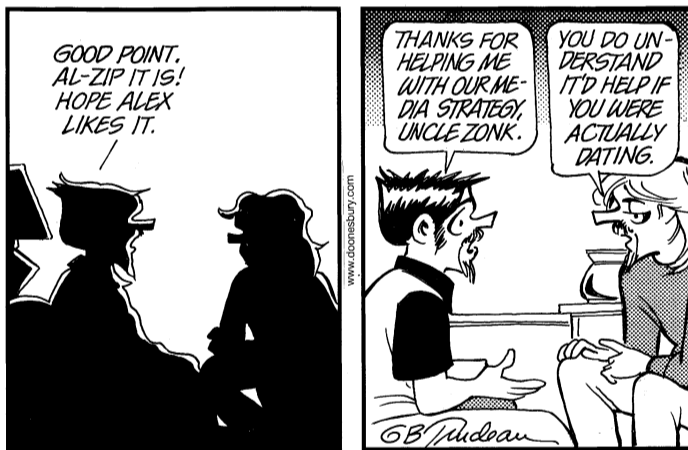
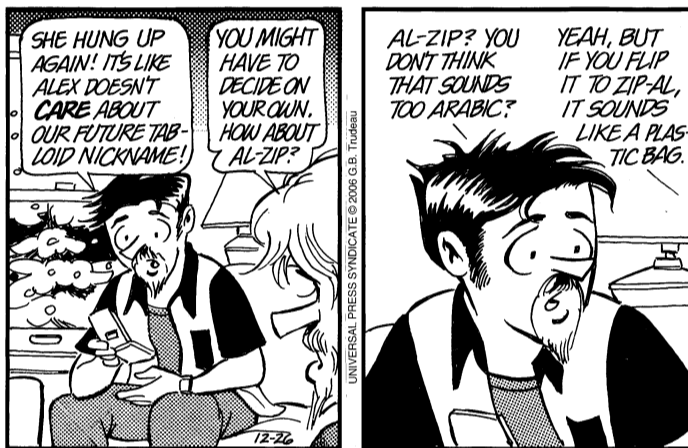
taken over there? Our military is getting depleted and our government and most individuals are going broke with the exception of the billionaire class.

The Democrats are going to have about two years to do something about that and we’ll see how close Lou Dobbs, a former Republican who has his own television program as well as a recent book that we just finished reading entitled “War on the Middle Class,” comes to reality. He now is registered as an independent. After all, it’s the middle class that does the work and pays the bills in this country. I wouldn’t even mind if they started up a group calling themselves the Middle Class Party and maybe we’d get some of those benefits the billionaires are getting.

Lou Dobbs was pretty critical of the way industry is treating our country and lobbying our politicians. Like a person said: “In life you should always use common sense and if that doesn’t work, you dazzle them with doubletalk.” Common sense is a little hard to find, but it is out there. All you have to do is listen and talk to your neighbors. People should be looking for consistency.

La Vern F. Isely
Monroe

DOONESBURY by Garry Trudeau



Despite tragic events this year, Kwanzaa is time to celebrate

Kwanzaa’s original meaning is “first fruits.” An African-American cultural celebration that began in 1966 in Los Angeles, it is based on African harvest celebrations and the fact that one of Africa’s gifts to the world was an advanced agricultural system.

The basics of Kwanzaa are seven days, seven principles and seven symbols. Beginning Dec. 26 and ending Jan. 1, each day focuses on one of seven principles (written in the Swahili language) that are essential to our African worldview while using seven symbols that represent a collective black aesthetic.

The seven principles (nguzo saba) and their day of celebration are Dec. 26, Umoja (unity); Dec. 27, Kujichagulia (self-determination); Dec. 28, Ujima (collective work and responsibility); Dec. 29, Ujamaa (cooperative economics); Dec. 30, Nia (purpose); Dec. 31, Kuumba (creativity); and Jan. 1, Imani (faith).

The seven symbols used on a Kwanzaa table and in the daily celebration are a kinara (seven-stick candleholder) representing our ancestors, mkeka (woven mat) representing our foundation, kikombe cha umoja (unity cup) representing our oneness, mishumma saba (seven candles) representing the seven principles of Kwanzaa, mazao (fruits and vegetables) representing how we work together, vibunzi (ears of corn) representing children, and zawadi (gifts) representing homemade gifts that reward work well done.

Kwanzaa is celebrated in individual homes and citywide in places where there are large populations of African-Americans. Although people are encouraged to personalize the celebration, there is always a Kwanzaa table, lighting a candle each day, and focusing on the principle of that day with a discussion or activity that illuminates how the principle is evident in family, community, the nation and the world.

This is a special invitation to celebrate the Kwanzaa holiday this year, not just because it is a beautiful way to connect generations of families, or a unique way to share culture and traditions, or even because it is a holiday with the simple items used being readily available. Don’t buy a Kwanzaa kit; most of these items are already in the home or easily purchased at little cost.

Fabu Carter Mogaka



Even when gifts are exchanged, they should be homemade like quilts that come from elders, or especially meaningful items like books.

This is a special invitation to celebrate the Kwanzaa holiday this year because there have been two recent events that are both tragic and searing.

Recently African-Americans were subjected to an American icon, Michael Richards, who played Cosmo Kramer on the hit TV show “Seinfeld,” raging and screaming the “N” word. I watched the video over and over as a stark reminder of the thin facade of American liberalism.

Richards referenced lynching, which was defined in the 1920s by the NAACP as any racially motivated murder. The NAACP defined the word because there were so many lynchings of black men, women and children. A particularly heinous lynching was of Mary Turner in 1918 in Valdosta, Ga. Mary, who was eight months pregnant, said that she would get even with those who hanged her husband by signing arrest warrants against the killers.

Some white residents of Valdosta decided to teach her a lesson for being courageous enough to be vocal about her pain. A mob tied her upside down to a tree, doused her with gasoline and burned her alive. So husband, wife and unborn child all lynched, and this was what Richards dared to joke about?

I say that “we” were subjected to Richards’ racist hatred because he didn’t know those men personally and he does not know me personally. He reacted to skin color. What he did know was to threaten and to ridicule, especially with the statement “They’re going to arrest me for calling a black man a n—?”

This madness was a segue into the next tragedy, with New York police

shooting 50 times into a car with three black men, killing one and wounding the other two. When Amadou Diallo was shot 41 times at his front door in the Bronx in 1999 while reaching for his ID card, no one was ever convicted of his death. Now Sean Bell is dead, and where is his justice? Justice is laughable if it is true, as Richards asserted on stage, that “you can’t challenge the white man.”

One of my favorite passages in “Beloved” by Toni Morrison is when Baby Suggs leads all of the honorable former slaves into the clearing in a communal healing service by first having them laugh out loud, then freely dance, and finally to burst out crying before it all becomes mixed up and everyone does all three. Kwanzaa is that for me, a place for communal healing.

I recently became ill with a cold but had promised to decorate a tree in the lobby of a medical facility and so traveled to a friend’s home to borrow African-American ornaments. Another friend joined us, and we began sharing distressing incidents.

I started off by telling them that for seven months, I had been going to a furniture store in an attempt to get a promised service that I had paid for, before finally contacting the manager. The manager’s response was to offer to provide the missing service but to ignore that I had been overlooked for seven months and to e-mail me the complaint department address since I didn’t like her rude response. I was left to ponder if this was horribly poor service, if it was racism, if it was about class, or if maybe it was all three?

When we three women gathered and shared hurting stories, we listened and consoled each other. Then we began to tell stories of triumph and victory.

Kwanzaa is a gathering of people who, while remembering the hurts of the past year, are more focused on the triumph and victory of black people everywhere. We honor our dead by celebrating that the progeny of Africa remain in America.

There will be a free, citywide Kwanzaa celebration from 1 to 3 p.m. Dec. 30 at Olbrich Botanical Gardens, 3330 Atwood Ave.

Fabu Carter Mogaka is a poet, writer and educator who lives in Madison.

Cuban health care has much to admire

Dear Editor: I have just returned from a trip to Cuba as part of a professional research program on women’s health sponsored by Marazul Travel, an agency licensed for travel to Cuba. The MEDICC organization acted as a consultant for the research program. I witnessed firsthand an admirable comprehensive, accessible, quality health care system.

Cubans may be poor, but their health statistics are in many areas equivalent to ours. In fact, their infant mortality rate is only slightly higher than the U.S. average. And if you take into consideration that Wisconsin has one of the worst infant mortality rates in the nation for African-Americans, I

think we have something to learn from our neighbors to the south.

I am very nervous about what is being planned by the U.S. administration and the Cuban exiles in Cuba’s period of transition away from Fidel Castro. I fear violence and the people of Cuba are worried as well.

We must accept that ultimately it doesn’t matter what we think about the Cuban system. They are a sovereign country who want a peaceful transition to whatever evolves post-Fidel. There are different kinds of freedom.

Laura Berger, RN
Madison

Truckers should pick own hours

Dear Editor: I am an independent trucker who fully endorses deregulation and cannot see what business it is of anyone’s what hours I operate my rig.

Unions are a false format dependent on legislation for their very existence. The current regulations on hours of service do not allow me to do what I am doing right now — taking a two-hour siesta on the way from Flint, Mich., to Burlington, Wis. I must drive a straight shift, or I get no credit for time in the sleeper.

I think that was a notion put forth by someone who was good at studying

the subject matter, not someone who actually knew anything about it.

Dave Zweifel in his Dec. 15 column used numbers that are highly suspect since he cited only biased sources. Why don’t you talk about the successes? Why don’t you cite me?

My goal this year was \$250,000. I passed that several weeks ago. If others can’t do this, then let them get out. This is not brain surgery. Perhaps it’s best to allow survival of the fittest to take place — even in the newspaper business.

Wayne Emmerson
Rio

Evjue funds will help combat AIDS

Dear Editor: On behalf of all of us here at AIDS Network, I extend our deepest thanks to The Evjue Foundation for its recent grant of \$10,000.

Because of support like yours, we have been able to keep the HIV infection rates among injection drug users at a minimum. The efforts of our clean syringe exchange program have helped to not only minimize infection rates, but have led drug users to se-

cure testing for other diseases as well, including hepatitis.

Perhaps most importantly, because of your support, our exchange staff members have also been able to refer injection drug users into treatment and rehabilitation.

Robert J. Power
executive director
AIDS Network