

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

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One more green festival

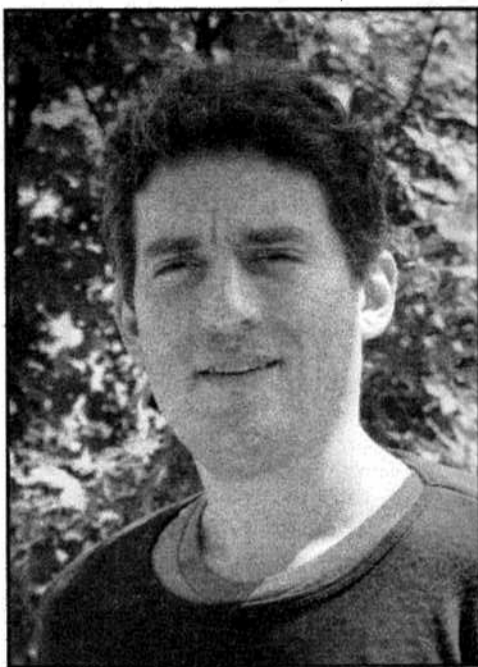
In what is becoming a spring ritual, I attended the Green Festival held in Chicago this past weekend. Accompanied by twenty other people from Knox College, we did the best we could with the five hours we had to explore one of the largest rooms in the Navy Pier. Nearly filled end to end with booths containing "green" food, merchandise, brochures, and advertisements/displays, this gargantuan space definitely provided an opportunity for some healthy walking. With at least three previous "Eco" Festivals under my belt, I attacked this one with a different focus. Rather than sitting somewhat passively listening to the keynote speakers (past ones included, Amy Goodman, Van Jones, and Thom Hartman), this time I set out to talk to as many people as I could. This change of emphasis actually turned out to be very illuminating. The following is just a snapshot of what I learned is going on in environmental circles around the country:

- Tim Magner was on hand to show off his three wonderful children's books, *An Environmental Guide from A to Z*, *N Is for Nature: An Environmental Alphabet Book*, and *Earl the Earthworm Digs for His Life*. Wonderfully illustrated and full of environmental wisdom, these books would make a great gift for any child. I'm looking forward to learning the lessons Tim offers when I read them each night to my children.

- Heard of Linux? It is a computer operating system (similar to Windows or Mac's OS X) that could change the world. According to Conrad, a co-founder of a start-up company looking for ways to help companies/groups make better use of their computer "garbage," Linux could play a key role in solving our computer woes, i.e., slowed machines that are rendered useless by viruses, cookies and insufficient RAM. How so? For one, Linux is free! So anyone can put it on their machine! Second, and importantly, one can freely download most of the programs that we use on this same machine. There is an open source version of most Office Suite programs (like Word, Excel and Powerpoint). Check this out at www.openoffice.org. Third, it requires a very little amount of RAM to run. This makes it an ideal operating system for older machines. So, in the future, rather than put your "old" machines in the closet to collect dust (or the dumpster), it may be possible to give them a second life with the help of Linux. I'll be looking into this seriously over the next few months and I'll definitely let you know what I find out.

- Drying clothes naturally has never been easier. Now there are Breeze Dryers www.breezedryer.com in all shapes and sizes. It isn't that a simple old-fashioned clothesline doesn't work, it does (so much for "advanced" technology). However, this innovative company has figured out ways to make it convenient and resourceful to hang wet clothes almost anywhere. Some colleges are now encouraging students not to use dryers by way of making these indoor systems standard in dorm rooms! Knox College students are starting to do some of this "eco-hanging" themselves.

- Do you want to be able to use your



computer without turning on the lights? Well, Solar LED Innovations may have the answer. They have a large collection of LED (light emitting diode) lights that operate solely on solar power. No more batteries! And you can power the light you will use at night by charging it (inside a car or house window sill) during the day, while you are at work or out on errands. Visit www.solarledflashlights.com for a glimpse of all the amazing varieties of solar-powered LEDs available.

- On the activist front, an NGO, known as Corporate Accountability International, has a campaign to ask Ronald McDonald to retire based on his hooking "kids on unhealthy food" for nearly 50 years. Considering all the reports of early onset diabetes and the fact that so many children are drawn to the "golden arches," isn't it time to put pressure on fast food purveyors? If interested, go to www.retireronald.org.

- Looking to buy bulk items for a fundraiser? Check out www.ecodot.com for T-shirts, bags, hats and even beanies made in the U.S.A. and out of 100% recycled materials.

- For those that missed the Eco Festival in Chicago, don't worry. There are two other upcoming events that should provide a healthy dose of optimism and pragmatic solutions: (1) On July 16-18, at the Walworth County Fairgrounds in Elkhorn, Wisconsin (~194 miles NE of Galesburg), the first Eco Fair 360 will be held; check it out at: ecofair360.com; (2) On August 7-8th, the Illinois Renewable Energy & Sustainable Lifestyle Fair will take place in Oregon, Illinois (~116 miles NE of G'burg); check it out at: www.illinoisrenew.org.

A quick look at this list indicates that buying/shopping is a key part of the answer to our ecological problems. Based on the percentage of space occupied by vendors hoping to promote/sell merchandise of some sort, it definitely seems like the Eco Festival is dedicated to feed our consumptive lifestyle—and there are many that want to profit from our "green" tendencies. However, this is a bit too pessimistic a view for me. I agree that we can't buy ourselves out of this one, particularly if "buying" means we expect to get some type of usable commodity for our dollars. However, if "buying" means allocating resources to improve the world, then I definitely believe that we can find many solutions (such as, clean water for all) with our material resources. One look at the world's military budget (now over \$1 trillion annually) is proof enough that we do have the \$\$ to feed, clothe, house, and medicinally care for all ~7 billion people on the planet. And, though there certainly were some opportunists at this year's Festival, based on my conversations with a great variety of purveyors, most of them genuinely think that every dollar redirected towards sustainable commodities is a step in the right direction. What do you think?