

give the Ojai Valley its unique value and soul are especially vulnerable due to the economic crisis, and believes that strengthening the local economy will help these organizations to survive. “The goal of a thriving Ojai goes beyond preservation of the quality of life supported by the current economy. A transformed local economy based on principles of goodwill and mutual support will enhance relationships,” she says.

Individually and collectively, members of the OEG are researching how to

best prioritize and integrate various programs and will be exploring these topics during their upcoming forum on the new economy. According to conference coordinator Roger Collis, “the new economy is not at odds with the old economy; it is not a replacement. Elements of the old economy are changing and people are hungry for alternatives.” The goals of the forum are to convene the community in a transformational context and to capture the creativity, ideas and vision that are needed to strengthen and support the local economy.

Collis emphasizes the importance of looking at the economy from a holistic perspective. “We are not just talking about finances, we are talking about a way of life, a new consciousness that embraces all facets of human life – cooperating with nature through sustainable agricultural practices, education for the whole child, caring for elderly, a health system that is affordable for all people, a culture of personal creativity and sense of community. There is so much more we can do as people and as a society once we are able to overcome our doubts and fears of the future. The future is ours to

shape, and new economic strategies are a necessary part of shaping a positive and hopeful world. We start with ourselves and with our communities and build from there.” •

Vickie Peters is a writer and editor with expertise in the development of public relations and marketing programs for public entities, private industry, non-profits and community service organizations. She graduated with honors from Cal Poly, SLO, and is working toward an MA in geography with an emphasis in political ecology.

See additional resources on page 21.

“The DNA of Bamboo”

by Hannah Apricot Eckberg

Bamboo is weaving its way into many aspects of our daily life. From soft, durable clothing to food, medicine, flooring and paper for local currencies, this versatile plant keeps popping up. This year at the ninth annual Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival in the Indio Desert of California, the plant was bent and twisted, bound and tethered into a nearly ten-story-tall art installation that provided shade and inspiration to the 180,000+ participants in the 100+ degree heat. With this project, the organization Bamboo DNA literally took building with bamboo to new heights!

This creative, yet utilitarian creation was brought to life by designer Gerard Minakawa, founder of Bamboo DNA, and licensed contractor and artisan Kevin Rowell, of the Natural Builders, along with a fabulous team of volunteers and incredible cooks. The two have about 20 years of combined experience working with this sustainable alternative to the more chemical-laden norms of building materials. After living in Asia and seeing the multitude of uses for bamboo, especially for building, Kevin says he became infected with a passion for it.

“The question is more of what can’t you do with bamboo. It takes on so many forms and applications. With its high sugar content, it may even be able to be used as a fuel,” says Gerard, who is constantly surprised by the abilities and versatility of the more than 1,500

species that grow in every elevation, NASA has even used it as a lightweight building material for space applications.

However, for both Kevin and Gerard, there is also a spiritual lesson. “The process is a spiritual evolution inspired

reports that with every project, he enjoys “new personalities and new talents, with an ever-widening circle of participants. We are hungry for new talent and new ideas. The world is too big to stay with old ideas. We all have so much to learn from people, the envi-



Flexible bamboo at the La Brea Tar Pits at the LA County Museum of Art (Dana Glenn)

by the bamboo. It affects participants forever,” explains Kevin. Some wisdom of bamboo that we could all apply to our lives: **be flexible; this is an organic process; let it evolve; relax into it; and let it take on a life of its own.**

Every Bamboo DNA project is unique, with a new group of volunteers, and new opportunities for creativity. Gerard

ronment, and even bamboo.”

For the structure at Coachella this year, Gerard and Kevin were required to provide stamped and wet-signed engineering plans to the city of Indio, to prove that the structure could withstand winds up to 95 miles per hour! Although the gusts didn’t reach those extremes, the builders were impressed with how well the 90-foot-tall structure

maintained itself. With state-of-the-art L.E.D. lighting and a suspended spire, complete with flaming torch to light up the night, this project helped demonstrate how well bamboo blends the line between art and functionality. With stretchable fabric strung from its arms, the bamboo provided not only much needed shade for the concert-goers, but also breathtaking beauty.

Santa Barbara-based architect Nils Hammerbeck was hired by Bamboo DNA to supervise the backstage area as it was transformed into a “Palapa Land.” Artistic, yet comfortable, lounges provided an area for musicians to relax, party or conduct interviews. Once again, colorful state-of-the-art L.E.D. lighting helped bring the bamboo to life. In the main camping area, a demonstration site was established where people taking a break from the music could be part of creating useful shade structures for the camping area. “In 30 seconds we had 30 people ready to do something with bamboo. From balls to shade structures, it is great to see people excited and doing something rather than just watching,” said Gerard. Provid-

ing hands-on learning opportunities is one of the bonuses of working with Bamboo DNA and the Natural Builders.

“Pound for pound, the compressive and tensile strength blows everything else off the charts,” says Kevin. “It is strong and flexible, and only takes six to eight years of grow time for a usable product. It is very easy to work with and treat. You only need hand tools to build huge

structures.” With his company, the Natural Builders, Kevin works with artists, building professionals, and individuals to create ecological spaces, develop new materials and methods, and understand and improve vernacular building techniques. This year he will be teaching at the Real Good’s Solar Living Institute in Hopland, in addition to special workshops for youth in west Oakland. In seeking the most the long-term, viable approach to sustainability, the Natural Builders are working on projects in the Bay Area to help people grow bamboo using grey water from their homes. In a few years the residents will be able to utilize the bamboo they grow for their own unique creations. Growing green solutions, even in a city.



Constructing the Bamboo Starscraper at Coachella Music Festival (Nils Hammerbeck)

earth and straw bail movement were ten years ago. This summer, to continue the momentum, Bamboo DNA will have installations at La Brea Tar Pits in LA and the Electric Picnic Music Festival in Ireland, as well as many fun events across the U.S.

Although most of the bamboo for projects like Coachella is imported from Indonesia or South America, it still has a much smaller ecological footprint than conventional materials. Rivaling steel in its strength, bamboo is much more accessible and easy to build with, as well as much better for the planet and the wallet. We live in a subsidized economy, not looking at true ecological costs – especially in the building industry,” says Gerard. If external costs of other building materials are factored in, such as mining for metals or the CO2 released in producing cement, the economic and ecological savings of bamboo demonstrate one reason it is gaining momentum as a movement itself. “If we factor in all economical aspects, especially the eco-foot print of building materials, bamboo is very affordable.

The permitting process for the project at Coachella helped demonstrate the viability of bamboo building. More and more contractors are working into remodels. It is about where the rammed

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In order to make bamboo even more accessible to daily lives, Kevin and Gerard are propagating a line of products soon to be released through www.bamboodna.com. For those looking to learn more, both that site and www.thenaturalbuilders.com are excellent resources. In addition, the American Bamboo Society offers people a place to network and grow their passion for this malleable and beautiful plant.

As our society looks for creative ways to save the environment and money, bamboo offers many unique opportunities. Have fun exploring them yourself, and let your own passion for bamboo grow. •

Hannah Apricot Eckberg is a freelance environmental journalist and can be reached at hannahapricot@gmail.com.

New thinking about what we're eating

Fresh

A film by ana Sofia juanes

FRESH celebrates the farmers, thinkers and business people across America who are re-inventing our food system. Among its main characters, **FRESH** features urban farmer and activist, **Will Allen**, the recipient of MacArthur's 2008 Genius Award; sustainable farmer and entrepreneur **Joel Salatin**, made famous by **Michael Pollan's** book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*; and super-market owner **David Ball**, challenging our Wal-Mart dominated economy.

From the FRESH Movie website (www.freshthemovie.com):
FRESH is a call to action; it means to inspire its viewers to positive change, not scare them into a terrified complacency. We bring together farmers, activists, chefs, and policy-makers, all working to create a healthier, tastier and more sustainable future. Please join us, not just as an audience, but as part of a movement to better our food system, and to bring about a new vision, a new paradigm, a new reality—one that works for everyone.

Please visit the edibleSLO website (www.ediblecommunities.com/sanluisobispo) for details about WHEN we will be screening this and other food films throughout the county. Also, HopeDance FILMs has 2 FiLM library/stores that rent out sustainable ag, farming, and food documentaries. They are located at Earth Tones in Paso Robles on Park Street, and Novel Experience Books in SLO city, on Higuera St. near Garden.

Some of the more popular FOOD films include:
The Real Dirt on Farmer John, Tableland, Good Food, Fed Up!, Beyond Organic, 2 Angry Moms, King Corn, Slow Food Revolution, Deconstructing Supper, Establishing a Food Forest, Global Gardener.

We are also in the process of gaining permission to screen:
Ingredients, Food Fight and Food, Inc.

If you wish to stay connected with our film screenings throughout the county, please email us at info@ediblesanluisobispo.com.

Author Michael Pollan