

# CONA TODAY

## CITIZENS OFFERING NEW ALTERNATIVES

Spring 2005

P.O. Box 649 , Newcastle, ME 04553

### Small Change . . . can add up to big benefits.

Maine still has such vast expanses of natural landscape that we may think that "sprawl" is not an issue that applies to us, but development of all kinds is going on all over the state, and particularly along the coast. Bit by little bit, farmland, forests and wild areas are becoming house lots. How are we to accommodate the housing needs of a growing

population while also maintaining the natural resources we, and all living things, require for sustaining life? This issue of CONA Today highlights some of the efforts in our community to provide housing that is affordable, respectful of our natural heritage, and which helps to maintain the small town character of our close-knit communities.

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### Midcoast Cohousing

The recent proliferation of new homes along the Maine waterfront has not gone unnoticed by the many who value the quiet simplicity of our granite coastline. The sheer size and visibility of some of these single-family seasonal dwellings, earning them the unflattering term, MacMansion, is alarming to environmentalists and community planners alike. Time and again, one sees the same, recently purchased multi-million dollar homes back on the real estate market, their owners moving on, never having connected with the community in which they had built. Many of us question the consumerist ethic that spurs such development and the concomitant disregard for our increasingly fragile environment.

In April, 2003, a group of like-minded Damariscotta-area residents met to study a European form of intentional community where people show concern for one another by conserving resources, sharing facilities, and connecting with other people, both older and younger. Known as **cohousing**, this concept of community organization as we know it today emerged in Denmark over twenty years ago. It has since spread to other countries, including the United States, where today there are nearly 90 functioning cohousing communities, one of which is located in Brunswick, Maine.

After one and a half years, and countless hours of intensive discussion and preparation, the Damariscotta group was now ready to embark on a similar adventure, and the Midcoast Cohousing Community was born. On November 1, four

members took up temporary residence in the spacious house on a 37-acre property the community had acquired in Edgecomb, where they will live until homes are built. Approximately twenty family units eventually will occupy clustered, compact, solar-heated dwellings on this south-facing property.

**What is a cohousing community and how does it work?** The community we envision is a small neighborhood where residents own their own housing units but share ownership of the whole property and a large community building, or "commonhouse". The community makes decisions by consensus, where every person affected by the decision has an opportunity to participate in the process.

Cohousing communities combine the autonomy of private dwellings with the advantages of community living. Land is held in common and buildings are clustered to allow for shared open space. Individual residences are clustered close to the larger common house where members may gather for meals. Each household has a private residence but shares extensive common facilities with the larger group, such as kitchen and dining hall, children's playrooms, workshops, guest rooms, library, craft nooks, and laundry facilities. Because community members share common space, most find it convenient and economical to build smaller dwellings than they might otherwise need. Shared septic systems and common wells save money and land.

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## Cohousing... continued from page 1

In these contemporary communities, intentional social interaction is important to residents, and all ages mix. To maximize casual contact, front porches characteristically border a pedestrian walkway or community garden. Mail boxes located in the common house give community members daily opportunity to interact. Children, too, develop their own bonds in the common house and outdoor playgrounds designed to be integral components of the community. In such an environment, supporting one another at different stages in the life cycle is natural to the community dynamic.

### How are we relating to the larger community?

Fall and winter open houses have drawn curious neighbors and potential residents; Thanksgiving dinner attracted 24 friends and relatives for a

sumptuous sit-down feast in the great room; a March potluck supper and contra dance lured 37 community members.

To thrive as a community, we look forward to a balanced cross-generational mix. Families with young children, teenagers, mid-life adults, and elders are all part of the human fabric we call, cohousing. Thirteen household units have currently committed to membership, while others are exploring what such a move would mean to them and how they might accomplish it. We welcome comments and questions and invite anyone interested to attend an open house. We especially encourage inquiries from families with young children. For further information, please check our website: [www.midcoastcohousing.org](http://www.midcoastcohousing.org).

Linda Pope

“Our real home is the one body that encompasses all things. It is our unity and inseparability. The trees are our lungs, the earth is our body, the water is our circulation. They are not our environment, they are your boundless body. They are you!”

Gerry Shishin Wick

## A Chat with Sally Currier Johns, member of Midcoast Cohousing

- Q.** Why did you choose to become a member of Midcoast Cohousing?
- A.** The idea of living in a community has appealed to me since the early seventies. For quite a while I lived in an informal urban, spiritual community, where we shared equipment, like garden tools, and ate together weekly. Often we cared for each others' children.
- Q.** How did you learn about Midcoast Cohousing?
- A.** I have known about cohousing for many years and three years ago I responded to an ad in the local paper about the formation of a cohousing community in this area. Since April of 2003 we have been working intensively to make this project a reality.
- Q.** So you've had lots of meetings?
- A.** Oh, yes. We meet two or three times a month, usually for three to four hours at a time, sometimes for full day workshops.
- Q.** How is the group organized, are there officers, like a president?
- A.** We have by-laws. We run the meeting according to a consensus model, drawing lots for different jobs: a facilitator, a time keeper, someone to take notes, and so on. We take time for each of us to talk about where we are in our lives and then we create an agenda for the meeting, and prioritize the items we need to discuss. Everything is done by consensus.
- Q.** That sounds like an unusual way to run a meeting.
- A.** Well, this way the meetings are always interesting and we really get to know each other, to respect ourselves and each other.
- Q.** Aside from the practical considerations of sharing the land and buildings, what do you see as your goals, the goals of the organization?
- A.** Our Vision Statement expresses it this way: “To create a caring, diverse and sustainable community, living close to, and cooperatively with, one another, and sharing resources as we live lightly on the earth”. That's what is most important to me.

# Genesis Community Loan Fund

The Genesis Community Loan Fund is a nonprofit lender and technical assistance provider with a special interest in innovative housing models. Genesis has supported projects in every Maine county, but we take particular pleasure in working with Midcoast Maine nonprofits. For one thing, Genesis was founded in Lincoln County, and our first investors were four Lincoln County churches. Our office is located in Damariscotta just off Main Street.

All of the Midcoast towns suffer from a serious “affordability gap”: the average income family can seldom find an affordable home. People who hold essential jobs in our coastal towns—school teachers, police officers, fishermen and health care workers—are forced to find housing elsewhere, contributing to sprawl and undermining the diverse nature of these historic communities.

Here are several examples of local projects supported by Genesis:

**Damariscotta.** In 2003 Genesis helped Coastal Economic Development build Ledgewood Court—24 townhouse apartments divided among four clustered buildings on Piper Mill Road. This affordable rental housing primarily serves health care workers whose wages do not measure up to inflated housing costs in our coastal communities.

**Edgecomb.** The ElderCare Network of Lincoln County relied on the Genesis Fund as project developer in the conversion of the old Eddy School to ten bright, comfortable apartments for seniors in 2004. Previously Genesis had provided

loans and technical assistance to help ElderCare Network develop five linked eldercare homes (each with six residents) in Boothbay, Waldoboro, Jefferson, Wiscasset and Round Pond, as well as a larger facility in Damariscotta.

**Wiscasset.** Last year Genesis provided a 20 year mortgage loan to CEI Housing for purchase of Deer Ridge, 27 apartments overlooking the Sheepscot River on Federal Street. The elderly residents (all at 60% of Area Median Income or below) pay only an affordable portion of their income as rent.

**Bremen.** Community Building Trust volunteers used a Genesis Fund construction loan (see article by Don Means in this issue) to build a house on donated land. A low-income family of six was able to substitute their labor for a cash down payment. Bath Savings provided permanent financing.

**Bath and Wiscasset.** In 1998 Genesis provided a mortgage to Elmhurst, Inc., for a Wiscasset foster home for two children with multiple special needs. The children’s families had long asked to have them in a training program near home. Last December Genesis helped Elmhurst purchase a sunny duplex in Bath to house four adult men with mental retardation. Three of the men are able to work within day programs.

For more information, call Beth McPherson, Executive Director, 563-6073.

Beth McPherson

## Introducing Guy Marsden CONA’s new website “master”

Guy is a new member of CONA who has lived in Woolwich for four years or so. He chooses to work behind the scenes, donating his time and web site design skills for politically and socially responsible groups. Guy also works with artists and inventors creating custom electronics for artworks and inventions. He is also a sculptor and furniture maker and is a partner in Salt River Artisans Gallery in Boothbay, which represents Maine made furnishings.

We thank Guy for volunteering to do this important job.

Be sure to visit [www.conamaine.com](http://www.conamaine.com) for information about CONA activities and events.

# Community Building Trust

The Community Building Trust (CBT) is a non-profit housing, all-volunteer development organization started in 1994 and based in Damariscotta. The first board directors were James Hatch, Dana Tavares, Beth McPherson, Paul Kando, Tammy Voisine and Tom Schmidt, with an additional five people also involved.

The following is from the original by-laws: “The purpose of the Corporation shall include the provision of housing opportunities to lower income persons and those who do not possess the means to furnish themselves with decent, safe and sanitary housing. In furtherance of its purpose, the Corporation shall operate as a Community Land Trust for housing in Midcoast Maine.”

The original organization built and completed its first home in 1996. The house was built almost entirely by volunteers (which included the future owners), and was a three bedroom, two bath home with a full daylight basement, located on three acres of land, donated by the Cuming-Mellon family, on the Biscay Road in Bremen, about ¼ mile from Rte. 32.

After 1996, the CBT was somewhat dormant until mid 2004 when some new people became involved. The present officers of CBT are: Don Means, President, Jim Austin, Vice President, Holly Baldwin, Treasurer, and Beth McPherson, Secretary. Other members of the board are: Sally Beaudette, Leon Garnett, Bob Hardina, Dave Kolodin, Tammy Voisine and Mariellen Whelan.

This spring CBT expects to buy some land in Bristol that would be suitable for a single family home or a duplex. The goal of CBT now is to

create homes for people who live and/or work in the Damariscotta area, where affordable homes for younger, working people are virtually non-existent. A study conducted for Bristol and South Bristol in 2002 found that a family with the median area income cannot afford a house priced much above \$108,000. In 2003 and 2004 the median sale price for homes in the two towns exceeded \$200,000.

Over the next three years CBT plans to enlist still more volunteers in building up to six single-family homes. To get started we need to find reasonably priced sites that are suitable for buildings: donation of land would be very much appreciated. Also, volunteers will be needed for many tasks, such as identification of a site, fundraising and, above all, construction.

Once the previously-mentioned Bristol property is purchased, CBT expects to collaborate with Habitat for Humanity (HfH) of the Bath-Brunswick area, which is anxious to do a Lincoln County area project. HfH has already won support from St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in Newcastle and The First Congregational Church of Wiscasset. HfH coordinates the labor of volunteers with contributions of money and materials from the community to build modest, affordable homes. The future homeowners are expected to spend hundreds of hours of labor - sweat equity - in building their future home as well as the homes of others.

If you or someone you know is interested in being a volunteer on such a project or has land that could be donated, please contact Don Means at 207-563-5973, [dmeans@lincoln.midcoast.com](mailto:dmeans@lincoln.midcoast.com) or make contact with some other member of the organization that you might know personally.

Don Means

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|-----------------|--|----------------------|--|
| President:      | Tom Schmidt  | Steering Committee:  | Jean Harris, Julia Myers,<br>Jenny Begin |
| Vice President: | Open   | Membership List:     | Linda Pope                               |
| Secretary:      | Millie Baggs   | Meet, Greet and Eat: | Charlie Hedrick                          |
| Treasurer:      | Caroline Walker  | Newsletter Editor:   | Doris Balant                             |
| Past President: | Joanne Clauson   | Peaceful Beginnings: | Jenny Begin                              |
| Reps-at-large:  | Sally Snyder, Donald Means,<br>Michael Stevens, Sharon Crosbie | Publicity:           | Jenny Begin                              |
| Forum Program:  | Kay Liss   | Public Liaison:      | Open                                     |
|                 |  | CONA at the Movies:  | Paul Kando                               |

# A History of CONA

By Julia Myers

## Chapter One • 1982 - 1993

In the spring of 1982 a Lenten series “The Nuclear Arms Race: a Study in Christian Ethics”, was offered by the Reverend Samuel Hartman of St. Andrews Episcopal Church, Newcastle. Several attendants, having a strong bond in opposing war in general, and nuclear arms in particular, came together to organize CONA, Citizens Opposing Nuclear Arms. By October we had begun publishing a monthly newsletter, enlisted 95 members, and were holding weekly meetings.

Election Day ‘82 found members at the polls obtaining signatures for what turned out to be the largest single-issue referendum in US history, the Nuclear Freeze.

Within a year we listed 267 members. Our activities focused on publicizing the Freeze. An essay competition, “Nuclear Arms- the Ultimate Dilemma”, stimulated thought and writing skills among students at Lincoln Academy and Medomak Valley High School. Dr. Paul Silverman, President of the University of Maine, presided over the distribution of \$1,000 worth of prizes to five students. \$500 went to the best essayist.

We walked many miles for peace, conducted “Bread not Bombs” sales in front of the “old” Yellowfront and wrote numerous articles and letters to local and state newspapers.

In these first years we were not without critics. Comments such as “Why not place your advertisements in Pravda or Izvestia?” and “the greatest threat to humanity today is continued action of groups such as yours, which present the US as a nation of cowards.” From a local minister: “If you truly value your freedom and way of life, don’t tie the hands of those that are sworn to defend the US. Given the events of the past few weeks (the downing of KAL Flight 007), do you really feel that we can negotiate a verifiable treaty with the Soviets?” Pax vobiscum!

Several towns in Maine passed an article proposing a resolution directing the President and Congress to take immediate action to halt the nuclear arms race. In Lincoln County, South Bristol voted approval of the article by an “overwhelming majority” (Portland Press Herald 3.11.83).

Dick and Jean Harris were leaders in the life of “Bridges for Peace”. In a leadership exchange they

went to the Soviet Union. Upon their return they provided CONA members with a careful, honest and enthusiastic picture of what was touted as our “mortal enemy”. Following their trip, a Soviet delegation, in return, came to Maine. Dmitri Maleev and Vyacheslav Sluzhiviv enjoyed gracious hospitality in several area homes. Side trips included Bar Harbor, Augusta, Brunswick and Portland. Dmitri’s eyes twinkled as we drove past B.I.W. He held his hand over his eyes, saying, “I will not peek at secret ships”, the most English he used in my presence.

During this period Ruth Pope was responsible for conceiving and executing the Peace Essay contest, at least one barn sale and a rummage sale. Enid Sharp faithfully and productively kept the newsletter under her wing, while Jean Harris corralled bakers for “Bread not Bombs” sales and a bake-off competition at Cheekako Restaurant. Edward Myers and Robert Marshall wrote erudite articles and letters.

Over time, several couples went to Washington to speak with Congressman John McKernan (now Mr. Olympia Snowe), and Senators William Cohen and George Mitchell. The former was advocating a “build-down” concept, an attempt to lure supporters away from the Nuclear Freeze, by generating a technical loophole whereby we could build more nuclear weapons.

“Beyond War: a Women’s Convocation” was held at the University of Maine, organized by Vinita Burns of Wayne, Maine, with a panel consisting of herself, Helen Nearing, and Julia Myers as speakers.

Perhaps you will remember the “Peace Ribbon” that was wrapped around the Pentagon at the time of the 40th anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Literally tens of thousands of painted, quilted or stitched ribbon banners from all over the US and a few from other countries depicted “What I cannot bear to think of as lost forever in a nuclear war.” Talented CONA members contributed.

The Maine Peace Mission, a statewide organization, pressed for legislation that would increase real security, and bring about negotiated arms control and reduction, and acted as a coordinator for the many peace groups. The Mission hoped to unite political voices into sustained and responsible conversations

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## **CONA History... continued from page 5**

with members of Maine's Congressional delegation. Eventually the Maine Peace Mission and the Maine Freeze Campaign became the on-going Maine Peace Action organization.

Trips to Washington for continued dialogue with members of Maine's elected representatives failed to persuade Representatives McKernan and Snowe, nor Senator Cohen. They continued to support appropriations for the "MX" missile program, but Representatives McKernan and Snowe did co-sponsor a bill to resume negotiation for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

CONA was honored in April '87 by the Maine Freeze Campaign with their "Seeds of Peace" award, citing "the involvement of CONA's 300 dues paying members", and for "fostering a spirit of tremendous cooperation among peace groups in the state, including Maine Freeze Campaign, Veterans for Peace, Bridges for Peace and Beyond War".

In December '88 the U.N. General Assembly passed a resolution calling for a Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty by a vote of 136-4. In 1989 165 members of Congress signed a letter to President Bush (1) calling for a C.T.B.T. by 1995.

Speaking in Brunswick in 1988, the Reverend William S. Coffin said, "All peace organizations must advocate a moratorium on testing as a necessary step to peace goals: a 50% reduction in ICBMs, multilateral reduction and non-proliferation". In closing, he said, "We are called upon first to be faithful to what is right and let economic success be a second consideration." Corporations are you listening?

Paul Warnke, Director of the US Arms Control and Disarmament Agency under President Carter and chief negotiator of Salt II, speaking at the Bath Area Citizens for Nuclear Arms Control said, "Failure to take advantage of Mr. Gorbachev's moratorium offer is a tactical and strategic error".

Toward the end of 1988 the Cruise Missile Referendum Campaign got under way. Cruise missiles fly low, following the contour of the land. If you were on a mountain in Baxter State Park, you would look down at them. The Navy planned to launch them from ships near Ellsworth and bring them down by parachute near Rangeley. CONA members covered 14 polling places in Lincoln County garnering 3400 signatures to a petition asking, "Do you favor stopping cruise missile tests in Maine?"

In March '89 nine CONA members attended a crowded cruise missile meeting hearing in Augusta. 72,000 signatures statewide were submitted. Peter Knauss spoke for CONA, noting that cruise missiles would cost Maine \$30 million dollars. Julia Myers spoke for CONA in terms of her children and grandchildren, comparing a family in Karelia with her family. She reminded listeners that a single cruise missile is at least 100 times more powerful than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima, and asked what social or political advantage is to be gained by obliterating a Karelian or an American family? Ultimately, the Navy abandoned the plan.

CONA was also able to contribute financial aid to Thor Ericson, a Lincoln Academy student, who participated in the 1988 Helsinki US-Soviet Youth Conference as the sole representative from Maine. Thor returned to attend the Junior Statesman summer program at Stanford University. A subsequent letter to CONA from Thor in 1992 established that as a Yale student he was awarded a Yale fellowship to study the municipalization of the Brazilian political system. He wrote, "At this point I'm more interested in what small political units can do about common world problems than in the promises or vague goals of large nations." Go, Thor!

Jean Harris continued her efforts with "Bridges for Peace", promoting the Maine-Komi project, a three year program of exchange, dialogue and cooperation between people of Maine and Komi.

To my uncertain knowledge, CONA's first report on affairs environmental came to light in 1990 when Senator Cohen spoke in Portland of the need for greater use of energy efficient motors and light bulbs. Government support for energy efficiency at that time was 1% of federal appropriations as opposed to 3% ten years earlier. CONA member Alfred Eipper also spoke frequently and forcefully on the dangers of overpopulation as an environmental threat.

During the Persian Gulf crisis candlelight Vigils for Peace in support of a negotiated, diplomatic solution on the Newcastle-Damariscotta Bridge were well-attended. Fund raising continues with another Ruth Pope success. An Open House and Garden Tour in July 1991 was followed by a fine barn sale at Ruth's barn, raising \$770.

An article appeared in the May '91 CONA newsletter quoting Dr. Frank Press, President of the National Academy of Sciences: "The possibility of ecological

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disaster due to an increase in global temperature is sufficient reason to act now." How much action has there been taken in this regard?

With kind and trusting forbearance, two history and social studies teachers of juniors and seniors at Lincoln Academy invited two CONA members, Darcy Boyd and Julia Myers, into their classrooms to allow students to express and discuss their thoughts about alternatives to violence. At the end of class each student was asked to write down one question he or she would like answered. Their questions and answers were subsequently published in our newsletter.

A session of letter writing to President Bush, Congressman Tom Andrews and Senators Cohen and Mitchell made for a productive evening. Subject matter included military expenditures, nuclear proliferation, arms reduction treaties and world population increase.

In 1992 at CONA's annual Christmas potluck supper,

Clifton Olds, Professor of History and Criticism of Art, presented a slide lecture on great works of art which depict the theme of peace. For this high point among our evening programs, we have Ruth Pope to thank.

This is the end of CONA's first decade. Of necessity, I've left out many events and neglected to mention names of hardworking, effective members, I recognize them now: Alfred and Molly Eipper, John and Florence Field, Enid Sharp and Robert Marshall, Arthur Hamlin, Jean and Dick Harris, Edward and Julia Myers, Ruth Pope, Joan Beauregard and David Ellis, Dick and Sally Snyder.

CONA speakers through the decade included: Dr. William Caldicott, husband of Helen Caldicott, both renowned anti-nuclear activists; Buzz Fitzgerald, former President of B.I.W.; Thomas Watson, former President of I.B.M.; Robert White, former Ambassador to El Salvador; Donald Kennedy, former President of Stanford University; Admiral Eugene Carroll, Deputy Director of C.D.I. on the C.T.B.T. and Tom Andrews, former US congressman.

To be continued...

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## Affordable Housing in Lincoln County?

A median priced house in Lincoln County costs \$235,000 (Feb. '05). An estimated 30 year 6% mortgage would require payments of slightly over \$16,000 a year. That payment is 43% higher than a median income household in Lincoln County can afford to pay. (According to current guidelines a borrower can pay 28% for mortgage, plus taxes, insurance and no more than 35% total debt including mortgage).

Half of Lincoln County households make less than the median income of \$40,000 per year. Under current guidelines a median income household could spend yearly up to \$11,200 for mortgage payments plus property taxes and insurance. This size mortgage allocation would buy a \$135,000 house in Lincoln County if the household has no more than \$4,800 a year in additional debt obligations and could come up with a down payment of \$6,750, and has an

excellent credit rating. It is more likely that heavy existing debt and other obligations, and difficulty in raising a down payment, would reduce the amount of mortgage that our hypothetical median income household will be able to afford. The Bristol/South Bristol 2002 analysis that Don Means references in his article on the Community Building Trust is appropriate for all of Lincoln County today. The most house you can afford in the county if you are a median income household is somewhere in the range of \$108,000 to \$135,000, and most likely at the lower end of that range.

Renters fare even worse than homeowners, with 34% of Lincoln County renters paying over 30% of their household income on rent. In Damariscotta / Newcastle over 41% of households pay more than 30% of their income on rent (US Census, '99 data).

Tom and Robin Schmidt

## CONA Annual Meeting

CONA is proud and excited to have as our speaker Angus King talking about "Travels with Molly" (Molly is his young daughter). He will take us on a reprise of his family's round-the-country RV trip after he left office as Maine's governor in 2003. Find out how Tabasco Sauce is made, the do's and don'ts of schooling on the road, why there are height limits on the Merritt Parkway, and what really goes on at the Port Townsend, Washington "Bed Race." This year's annual meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 15 at the 2nd Congregational Church in Newcastle, starting at 5pm, with potluck dinner at 6, followed by Angus King's talk.



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