

CONA

Citizens Offering New Alternatives
www.conamaine.com

PO Box 649, Newcastle, ME 04553
FALL 2008

CONA'S ANNUAL PLANNING RETREAT

In August we gathered at Mike Stevens' lovely home on the "Point" around a tasty potluck supper to discuss how we could fulfill our mission statement this year.

Consensus was around two issues: exploring peaceful means to resolve problems, and focusing on pollution and energy alternatives. Everyone felt our efforts in these areas should address and support the needs in our community. The question was, how can we best do this? Through meetings, films, forums, our website, community events?

We discussed attendance at meetings and films - sometimes small! We recognize that in difficult times with so many events in our community to choose from, people may prefer watching a musical or a comedy to hearing about our world's problems.

Our plan is to vary the formats: to continue to present important speakers, show a relevant film from time to time, make our website more effective, and plan an additional community event like Peaceful Beginnings and Potluck and Poetry, which always draws the greatest numbers of participants. We'll also vary program times with some daytime events so as to limit those blustery winter night meetings.

Our question for you, our members, is, what would you like CONA to provide in the coming months and years? To be truly your organization CONA needs to hear from you!



CONA Board members at the annual retreat: Back row: Ted Clapp, George Van Deventer, Jean Harris. Middle row: Jennie Begin, Alayne McLeod, Mike Stevens. Front row: Doris Balant, Kay Liss, Millie Baggs. Taking the picture: Joe Brennan.

CONA WELCOMES TWO NEW MEMBERS TO THE BOARD:

Alayne McLeod

I first became aware of CONA when I went to the program featuring a talk by Anouar Majid. I was so impressed with the informative content of the program that I joined then and there.

I first came to Maine from New Jersey 52 years ago with my husband, and vacationed here every summer. We built our dream house on Pemaquid Pond in 1990. Before retirement in 2000 I gave piano lessons for many years while I raised three sons. Later I had a very interesting career with IBM. Organizations like CONA, Round Top Center for the Arts, go to "CONA welcomes..." on page 2

POTLUCK AND POETRY

Tuesday, December 2, 6 pm at the
Second Congregational Church in Newcastle.

Join our annual celebration of poetry, the "stories of the soul," as the great American poet Stanley Kunitz called it. Everyone is invited to bring a poem to read, yours or from a favorite poet. If you bring some extra copies, others can take your reading home to enjoy again later. FMI: 563-1216, dbalant@roadrunner.com

This year our special guests will be members of the Pemaquid Poets: Peggy Coakley, Jean Lowe, Phyllis Lucina, Anne Mullin, Sally Woolf-Wade, and George Van Deventer. The Pemaquid Poets got their start as a writing group in the fall of 2000. Determined to learn go to "Potluck..." on page 2

CONA REMEMBERS REG GAGNON

Our good friend and former CONA treasurer, Reg Gagnon, recently succumbed after a long battle with cancer. Reg and his wife, Suzanne, were such great role models for all of us who knew them. They were very involved in several organizations which benefited this community, but we especially remember them for their commitment to the people of Haiti. Suzanne spoke to many groups about St. Boniface Haiti Foundation, the mission they worked with, and how we could help to meet the desperate needs there.

Reg and Sue traveled to Haiti for several years and spent two-week periods in Fond du Blanc up in the hills volunteering in the Foundation's orphanage and new hospital.

Three years ago they agreed to be house parents for a group home for college students in Port au Prince for six months. It was a dangerous era, a time when any display of political affiliation was likely to bring retaliation. The stories the Gagnons brought back were funny and scary, but you knew they were very attached to these young men. Their stay was cut short by revolution, and they were lucky to find space on the last plane out of Port au Prince.

Haiti, the poorest country in our hemisphere, has a long history of political and economic suffering. In the devastating hurricanes this spring and summer the new hospital at St. Boniface was washed away. Food shortages are so severe that children are reduced to eating mud pies.

If you would like to help, please send a donation to St. Boniface Haiti Foundation, 400 N. Main St., Randolph, MA 02368.

POTLUCKCONT'D FROM PAGE 1

from established poets as well as from each other, members have since met every other week to share poems, discussion, supportive criticism, and joy of good company. Individual members have many publications and awards to their credit, and the group has published anthologies to accompany their annual summer public readings. Current Pemaquid Poets include the poets mentioned above, plus Suzy Collins and Jane Roos-Griesar, who leave us during the winter months.

CONA WELCOMESCONT'D FROM PAGE 1

and Senior College have made this a very interesting retirement.

George V. Van Deventer

...moved permanently to Maine in the spring of 1973. Over a period of 20 years he developed a dairy herd, from one cow to 130 in the town of Washington. George was Executive Director of the Live Poets Society from 1989 to 1998. In 2000 he created the successful Poetry/Art Journal *Off the Coast*. He joined the CONA Board because he liked the social outreach to the local public that offered a family-centered initiative. He says there's a sense of social responsibility with CONA.

~•~

We thank Mike Stevens, who so capably chaired and steered us for several years. He has stepped down to make time for family and other commitments, but we're happy that he remains on the Board so we won't lose his steady hand and thoughtful counsel.

Clearly since no one of us could replace him, we have again resorted to a triumvirate: Wendy Ross, Kay Liss and Doris Balant will share the Leadership Committee.

WEBSITES TO EXPLORE

- Local: www.midcoastgreencollaborative.org
- This Brave Nation (online documentary film series) www.bravenation.com
- Closer to Truth: Cosmos, Consciousness and God (television series) www.pbs.org
- Millennium Development Goals (UN goals to end extreme poverty) www.millenniumpromise.org
- Faith in Action: Communities of Faith Bring Hope for the Planet (report) www.sierraclub.org
- Worldchanging (solutions-based online magazine) www.worldchanging.com
- See our website www.CONAMAINE.org for more.

CONA's mission is to provide opportunities to address the evolving problems of peace and social justice locally and globally. Our programs include education, discussion, and celebration to encourage the community to become active, involved citizens. We work in collaboration with other regional organizations sharing concerns for pressing issues such as poverty, overpopulation, war, and environmental protection.

BE SURE TO VISIT OUR WEBSITE WWW.CONAMAINE.COM

LA CLIMATE ACTION CLUB IMPRESSES CONA AUDIENCE WITH ACHIEVEMENTS

by Kay Liss

The Lincoln Academy Climate Action Club impressed all who attended a CONA public forum on October 29 at Skidompha Library – with their achievements, enthusiasm and ideas for the future.

The Club was founded about a year ago by then sophomore Chloe Maxmin, and now has about 20 members in all grades. Three Club members, Chloe, Jeanette Schaible and Tim Gormley, spoke at the CONA program about their successful campaigns on campus to reduce idling of school buses and recycling batteries. Batteries are placed in large receptacles throughout the school and are then brought to the local transfer station for recycling. A campaign to collect printer cartridges has begun as well.

The Club has also reduced energy use in school computers with the installation of “local cooling” software. The group has learned how to do energy audits, with the guidance of former CONA board member, Paul Kando. One of its most ambitious projects is a paper vs. plastics campaign. The Club just produced a canvas bag which will be distributed free to local merchants. Chloe said they had silk-screened their own logo on it, a picture of the blue planet with “Damariscotta” written around it.

A short film Chloe made, which addresses the issue of the environmental damage caused by plastic bags, was shown. It was very well produced, with graphs about the increase in carbon dioxide on the planet (which the making of plastic bags, a petroleum product, contributes to) and graphic photos of acres of discarded plastic bags. (It can be seen as a YouTube video if you Google “First here, then everywhere.”)

The students also talked about winning a \$1000 grant and a trip to an “environmental boot camp” at the University of Florida this summer. The Club was one of five teams from 500 schools to have won the award, sponsored by Youth Ventures and the Earth Island Institute. Chloe, one of three club members to attend, said, “It was great to have contact with other kids doing the kinds of things we’re doing.”

Another exciting development: they just finished filming with a film crew for an upcoming appearance on the Sundance Channel’s “Big Ideas for a Small Planet” series. The channel had heard about the Club from its Youth Adventure award.

Future Club plans include a campaign to change from plastic to bio-plastic (made from corn) utensils in the school cafeteria, and installing a device on the

vending machines to reduce their energy use.

There were lots of questions and comments from audience members, including how the Club could get its message out more to the community and possibly putting the battery recycling cans around town. It was also suggested that CONA have a liaison person with the Club so we could assist in its efforts.



Climate Action Club members on Damariscotta's Main Street ready to distribute their new canvas bags to merchants.

NIGHTSONG

Seven lights bob in shivering night
Outside the mouth of John's Bay
Shrimp boat glimmer through watery darkness
Waiting for the nets to fill
Their lights, a glow of jewels
Sparkle on velvet skyline
Radio waves float their quiet voices
Signals leap across the blackness
Crackling with companionship
Aimless nighttime dreamlike words
Strung together by loneliness
Reaching out over wintry water
To touch some other men in boats
And listeners alone on shore
Eavesdroppers on the radio scanner
A fragile chain of reassurance
All holding hands in the dark

Sally Woolf-Wade

THE WORLD WITHOUT US BY ALAN WEISMAN

St. Martin's Press

In what ecologist Bill McKibben calls "one of the grandest thought experiments of our time," Alan Weisman considers how the world would go on without us, wondering "how nature might flourish if granted the chance." Drawing on the expertise of scientists, engineers, religious leaders, and his own explorations, Weisman describes what would disappear, what would remain, and what would flourish, if we were no longer here.

He begins with a "lingering scent of Eden," a visit to the Bialowieza Puszcza on the border between Poland and Belarus, the last, tiny remainder of the wilderness that once covered Europe. There, 500-year-old oaks and a small herd of wisent are a reminder of the kinds of ecosystems that once covered the Earth.

Without us, what would disappear? As Weisman describes "unbuilding your home," think about repairs you have made in recent years and you can see how long your house would last without you. Then there is the "city without us." What you won't see as you enjoy New York City's attractions is the crews of men constantly pumping away the steadily rising groundwater under its pavements. Native plants would gradually overtake the half-million exotic trees brought in to create Central Park, heavy metals from cars and factories leaching into the soil would corrode tanks containing petroleum and chemicals, which would then leach into the soil, gradually dissipating over many millennia. A similar scenario will take down the rest of the world's cities, though, paradoxically, some of the oldest will last the longest.

What would remain? The chapter title "Polymers are Forever", answers the question. Since World War II plastic materials have become so ubiquitous that it's almost impossible to determine how much plastic is in our environment. Plastic objects in the ocean have now become ground down so fine by wave action that it's expected that "soon everything alive would be eating them." Plastic granules are also used in scrubbing products such as skin exfoliants and to scour paint from boats and airplanes, ultimately also ending up in the ocean.

In "The World Without Farms" Weisman reminds us of the revolutionary change brought about by our discovery of farming, which began the formation of settlements, cities—and what we call civilization. He traces the changes in the American landscape from the forests our colonial ancestors found here to current agricultural practices, and what happened in between, as farming became industrialized and scientific, losing diversity through monoculture and genetic manipulation.

The great naturalist E.O. Wilson "bets all human attempts to improve on nature, such as our painstakingly bred horses, would revert to their origins....The plants, crops, and animal species man has wrought by his own hand would be wiped out in a century or two. Many others would also be gone, but there would still be birds and mammals. They'd just be smaller. The world would mostly look as it did before humanity came along. Like a wilderness."

In subsequent chapters, Weisman considers the fate of ancient and modern wonders of the world, a "World without War," and the nuclear legacy in a world without humans.

I was reluctant to read what looked like a kind of doomsday book. Like all of us anthropocentric beings, I don't want to imagine a world without ME. To my surprise, I found this book expanded my appreciation for the wonder that our Earth still is, and an understanding of what we might still be able to do "to make it through what many scientists call this planet's last great extinction (when, five billion years from now, the sun takes back all the inner planets) – make it through and bring the rest of Life with us rather than tear it down. The natural history lessons we read in both the fossil and the living records suggest that we can't go it alone for very long.... Without us, Earth will abide and endure; without her, however, we could not even be."

Doris Balant

CONA AT THE MOVIES HAS ENDED

With his full-time commitment to local energy solutions (see the website www.Midcoastgreencollaborative.org), Paul Kando has had to discontinue the "CONA at the Movies" series. We want to express our deep gratitude to Paul for his work in bringing us such informative and stimulating films.



Another Book Recommendation

**THE LIMITS OF POWER:
THE END OF AMERICAN
EXCEPTIONALISM
BY ANDREW BACEVICH**

Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company

The next president will determine the fate of our soldiers in the Middle East, and our position in the world. In *The Limits of Power* Andrew Bacevich, a history professor and retired army colonel, argues that our global problems stem from Americans' desire for cheap oil, and credit and consumer goods. He urges us to recommit ourselves to the principles of service and sacrifice instead of using troops to reshape the world in America's image.

I especially enjoyed his perspective of our history and the many ways we have lost our way. He is non-partisan in viewpoint and his writing style is lively.

Millie Baggs

~•~

What are you reading?

We would love to hear from you about books relevant to CONA's programs that you have found interesting and would like to share with others.

SLAUGHTER

A crossword puzzle clue:
"has the rolling in the aisles"
and I write the word "slays"
in the square now alive
with vaudeville acts my father
told me he loved to watch
as a kid.

Blackstone the Magician,
Fred and Adele, Will Rogers
and his horse – the Keith Circuit
brought the best to Boston
he said, and dimes and nickels
earned delivering groceries
paid admission.

Comedians topped the bill:
W.C. Fields, Ben Blue,
Harold Lloyd, Olson and Johnson,

guys carrying ladders and knocking
each other silly. "Who's on first?"
Between World Wars a generation
slaughtered by laughter.

Anne Mullin

AMERICA GREW FAT

*... the majority of us have family trees
rooted in farms and fields.*

Ronald Blythe, from his essay – "Clare's Two-Hundredth Birthday, 13 July 1993"

In the early days of America
nearly all the land was covered with trees;
everyone had an ax to grind
and used it felling oak and spruce.

America grew fat
without a predator in sight.

It grew off trees,
some the size of fortresses,
beautifully exposed like monuments of another time.

There are no boundaries in a forest.

Families rooted in farms and fields
became an army
uprooting a once-in-a-lifetime harvest.

Like soldiers deserting their ranks,
settlers staked claim to where they were
while fresh recruits pushed up river
pond after pond.

George Van Deventer

CONA BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2008-2009

Millie Baggs, Secretary
Doris Balant, Leadership Committee, Newsletter.
563-1216. dbalant@roadrunner.com
Rosie Bensen, Programs
Jenny Begin, Peaceful Beginnings
Joe Brennan
Ted Clapp
Sharon Crosbie, Membership, Hospitality
Wendy Ross Eichler, Leadership Committee,
Programs. 549-3869. wsross@erols.com
Jean Harris
Gretchen Hull, Communications
Kay Liss, Leadership Committee
Guy Marsden, Webmaster
Alayne McLeod, Hospitality
Don Means, Treasurer
Linda Pope, Mailing List
Michael Stevens
George V. Van Deventer, Hospitality

PEACEFUL BEGINNINGS 2009

January 1, 2009

Skidompha Library, noon until 3:00 p.m.

Join us to make a peaceful, joyous beginning to the New Year. Everyone, of all ages, is invited to attend CONA's annual Peaceful Beginnings celebration of community on New Year's Day, 12 noon to 3 pm, at Skidompha Library. The first Peaceful Beginnings was organized during the first Gulf War



Taken at a past Peaceful Beginnings

more than a decade ago as a way to bring people together to reflect, create, foster kindness, get to know our neighbors and focus on the joyful.

Years later, our country is still engaged in aggressive military action around the globe and during Peaceful Beginnings, on this first day of the New Year, we can come together to affirm the peaceful aspects of our society through poetry, music, art, food and conversation.

Everyone is encouraged to bring finger food to share during the informal potluck throughout the afternoon. Check with local newspapers for a complete listing of the events and musicians at the end of December. If you would like to help out in any way, call Jenny Begin at 563-3781. We hope to see you all on New Year's Day. Invite your friends; bring your children!



The CONA newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

CONANEWS Editor: Doris Balant

Design and prepress: Moonlighter Graphics

The date on your label indicates the calendar year in which you last renewed your membership. Please renew for 2009. Keep CONA strong. Thank you!

CITIZENS OFFERING NEW ALTERNATIVES
PO BOX 649
NEWCASTLE, ME 04553