

Since the advent of the responsible business movement in the 1980's, the concept of the triple bottom line had spread to many companies, Yet the environmental crisis has deepened, wealth inequality has expanded. Family farms are being forced out by factory farms, family businesses forced out by Wal-marts.

Large corporations often eliminated local companies, as they spread their brands across the county, getting larger and larger until they are most often bought up by multinationals.

Other companies that have been models of social responsibility were being sold to multinationals, adding to the concentration of wealth our movement had intended to address –

Odawalla Juice was sold to Coca-Cola, Rhino Records to Time Warner, Cascadian Farms to General Mills,

and more recently Stonyfield Farms to Group Dannone, makers of Dannone Yougert, Toms of Maine to Colgate, and the Body Shop to L'oriel.

I could see that the socially responsible business movement that I had been part of for many years was continuing to use the old paradigm of continuous growth to measure success

And we had been neglecting the important issues of:

A sense of place,

Appropriate scale – of human scale that maximizes the quality of relationships and the issue of ownership - democracy depends on having many owners.

The more owners, the more freedom.

So now the movement for responsible business has two fronts – those bringing reforms in large corporations, such as ben & Jerry's and Stonyfield continue to model,

and those working to build an alternative to corporate globalization through the local living economy movement

## **Founding of BALLE**

That is why, six years ago, in the fall of 2001, I co-founded BALLE, the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies.

I started with a simple premise – an environmentally, socially and financial sustainable global economy is comprised of a network of sustainable local economies – or living economies, as we call them, because that support both natural life and community life.

Rather than a global economy controlled by large corporations, I envision a decentralized global network of local living economies, comprised of independent, locally owned businesses.

These living enterprises are human-scale businesses that strive to work in harmony with natural systems while creating community wealth and vitality.

In local living economies, basic needs are produced at home, while what is not available locally is bought through fair trade exchange which supports the local communities where products originate.

### **Mission of BALLE**

BALLE is now an alliance of over 55 networks in Canada and the US, which we help to catalyze, strengthen and connect. There are over 15,000 locally owned, community-based businesses in our network.

It would be wonderful to start one here in Yellow Springs, as well as Cincinnati, Columbus and Cleveland.

BALLE is a bottom up organization where experimentation happens at the local level and success stories, such as local first campaigns, are passed onto the other networks through the BALLE network.

We have an annual international conference, with our 6<sup>th</sup> annual conference coming up June 5-7, 2008, at Boston University.

Website is [www.livingeconomies.org](http://www.livingeconomies.org)

### **Reinventing Growth**

Rather than spreading our brands, BALLE businesses spread our models – teaching others our business model and practices.

BALLE businesses are reinventing growth. Rather than expanding our businesses beyond our own region by creating chains or national

brands in the cookie cutter format of the industrial era, which require long distant transport,

BALLE entrepreneurs to look at the needs of our own community.

What imports can we replace to make our communities more self-reliant?

We can look within the essential building blocks of a local living economy for the businesses our community may need, such as:

Locally grown and processed food,  
Locally grown fiber crops and textile production,  
locally designed and made clothing,  
green building, design, construction and building materials,  
renewable energy production,  
alternative transportation,  
recycling and reuse,  
earth-friendly cleaning supplies,  
community capital institutions,  
independent retail,  
local manufacturing,  
health and well-being products and services,  
local arts & culture,  
independent media.

### **Climate change and peak oil**

Cheap oil has been the lifeblood of corporate globalization, making it possible for multinational corporations to ship products from distant places where labor and natural resources are easy to exploit.

There are studies that show that the amount of a product, such as pork or apples that is exported out of a state or country is equal to that which is imported! There is no reason to ship goods all over the world that could largely be produced at home.

A study showed that Americans imported English sugar cookies, and the English imported American cookies, and it was pointed out that it would save a lot of carbon emissions if they simply exchanged recipes!

The unnecessary transportation of goods around the globe is a major contributor to global warming.

The only beneficiary are the multinational corporations that dominate global trade – and the losers are the environment, farm animals in the industrial system, and all of us who no longer have access to local food, and other basic needs.

U.S agricultural subsidizes amplify the problem by making it possible for US corporations growing corn, wheat, rice, soy beans and cotton, to sell below the cost of production putting small farmers out of business in developing countries, as well as our own. Corn dumped into Mexico has put thousands of Mexican farmers out of business, causing mass immigration to the US, just as the Zapatistas predicted when they held their uprising on the day NAFTA went into effect.

Once thriving local economies have been destroyed by cheap imports. Now people around the world, including our own communities, have become dependent on large corporations to provide basic human needs of food, clothing, energy, and building materials shipped long distances.

The solution is clear – It's The Community Solution! - we must reduce shipping by developing community self-reliance with local energy security, local food security, and small scale local processing and manufacturing to provide basic needs locally.

Building local living economies is not only a way to reduce carbon emissions,

it is also preparing us for a world effected by climate change and peak oil by ending our reliance on long supply chains easily disrupted by adverse weather, the rising cost of oil, and social upheaval.

### **Decentralization/Localization**

The local living economy movement is essentially about decentralization and localization:

- localization of business ownership to bring economic control back to communities.
- localization of energy sources so that we're not dependent on oil from far-away places and every community has energy security.
- localization of our food system so that we have food security—
- localization of building to use local wood, stone and other local

building materials and to create energy efficient designs appropriate to local weather and environmental conditions.

- localization and decentralization of communications, promoting independent media, so that we have many sources of information and are not dependent on corporate controlled media.

- decentralizing and localization of culture and languages to protect local cultures from corporate monoculture and to support local artists, musicians and creative innovators in every community.

- \* Localization of politics – to reinvigorate local politics and align local government and economic development strategies with local business ownership and building green self-reliant local economies

- Localization of leadership to have many local heroes rather than national icons.

## **Peace**

Perhaps most importantly, developing communities around the world with local food, water and energy security, creates the foundation for world peace. As Fritz Schumacher, author of Small is Beautiful once said "People who live in highly sufficient local communities are less likely to get involved in large-scale violence than people whose existence depends on world-wide systems of trade."

## **Turning Point toward cooperation**

When I think about the challenges of peak oil and climate change, and what we must do as a community to prepare for this, I imagine scenes from movies where a town comes together to prepare for a coming storm or the invasion of a foreign army. Passing bags of sand from hands to hands, piling them up to protect the entrance ways, or rushing supplies of food in from the countryside. There is urgency. At such a time, competition is not an option - everyone is looking for ways to work together, recognizing that we need each other to accomplish our common goals and ultimately, to survive.

Moving from being a competitive businessperson to a cooperative one in order to build a local living economy in my region was a big turning point for me.

The roots of this go back to my exposure to indigenous culture when I was a VISTA volunteer living in an Alaskan Eskimo village in 1969.

Hoarding, to have more than is needed, was unthinkable and unheard of in Eskimo culture.

When an Eskimo catches his first seal in the spring after a long hard winter, his wife holds a "seal party," and invites all the women in the village. She divides the seal meat up between all the families. After the meat is divided, the woman gives away other things that the family may have accumulated during the year.

Eskimos had no sense of envy. If I were to say, "I love that sweater you're wearing" to an Eskimo, they would just take it off and give it to me. You have to be careful what you admire! They couldn't conceive of the concept of envy, because they are committed to sharing and living cooperatively and have faith that the universe will provide what is needed to survive.

When I contrasted my own society, I realized that our consumer economy is actually based on envy. Advertising creates envy, so we feel as if we have to buy a new dress or makeup so we can look like the models in the ads, or we have to buy a new car, or smoke the same cigarettes or drink the same beer as the handsome, macho men in the ads. We use envy to drive our economy. And as Pat pointed out, big business spends billions of dollars on advertising to affect our behavior and life-style.

In our society, we reward people who are greedy and we actually admire the ones who hoard the most – the ones most gluttonous, who consume the most natural resources – living in the biggest houses, driving gas-guzzling cars, wearing different outfits every day.

Advertising programs us to base our self-esteem and security on how much we have. The Eskimos were the happiest people I've ever meet, and I believe its because their self-esteem and security were not connected to money, but to community. They understood their place in the world - that all life is interconnected, that life's resources belong to all and that we must share and cooperate in order to survive.

That's how BALLE business owners are now organizing in local BALLE networks – moving from competition to cooperation in order to build an economy that reflects our environmental and spiritual interconnection.

Another example of a BALLE business is Comet Skateboard, a company co-founded by BALLE board member and former Exec Dir. Don Shaffer, which has a commitment to sharing the technology they are developing. They developed a soy-based resin that they are now sharing with competitors.

In our Philadelphia BALLE network, Sustainable Business Network, there are six members who are independent coffee shops. They formed a cooperative to purchase fair trade coffee together. As individual companies they couldn't afford to print cups with their logos because the minimum is so high, so they have plans to print cups with all six logos.

There is no such thing as one sustainable business operating alone. We must be a part of sustainable systems. And there is no such thing as one self-reliant person. We need each other all working together to build community self-reliance in order to secure our future.

### **greatest wealth**

If poverty is not being able to provide for oneself, community self-reliance is our greatest wealth.

Community self-reliance offers a meeting place for the left and right, of liberals and conservatives, because it combines the values of self-reliance favored by the right

with the values of community and cooperation favored by the left.

Community self-reliance is something we can all commit to working on together. Ours is a movement which can, and must, be embraced by all – a way of doing business that is not only beautiful in the loving relationships it builds, but essential to our survival in a changing world of climate change, peak oil and environmental collapse.

### **Diversity and inclusion**

As we build a new economy of new local businesses, this is the time to make great strides toward economic justice.

It's important that we help those who have been left out of the global industrial economy, find ownership opportunities in local living economies.

We can do this by directing our government agencies and our capital toward an economic development strategy that helps minority entrepreneurs start the businesses their communities need to gain self-reliance.

In our businesses we can mentor and hire young people of color. We can develop partnerships with minority businesses and have sister relationships with minority-owned restaurants as the White Dog does, or with a minority owned health clubs, as BALLE co-founder and co-owner of Longfellows health clubs Laury Hammel does.

### **Role of investors – living return**

We need money to grow local economies. Many of us put our savings in the stock market but that takes money out of our local communities. When I realized that, I disinvested from even screened stocks and put my savings into the Philadelphia Reinvestment Fund, where my money is loaned out to small businesses and non-profits in my own region.

It even provided the money to build the wind turbines in the mid part of Pennsylvania that produce the wind energy we use at the White Dog.

I call this getting a “living return” – not only a financial return, but the benefit of living in a stronger and more sustainable local and global economy.

### **Fun**

During debate and discussion about climate change and peak oil there is often a focus on the costs and hardships of moving to a low-carbon economy.

But there is little talk of the benefits to our quality of life. We're not talking about going back to the cave age,

but rather, about gathering with friends over a meal of locally produced food, in a warm, well-insulated house, and getting there by riding our bikes or walking along uncongested streets or taking public transportation.

People go to farmers markets not just to get food, but for the sense of community and sense of place that comes from it.

In her new book, “Dancing in the Streets” Barbara Ehrenreich talks the importance of “collective joy” and how it is often missing in our industrialized, materialistic society, which she believes has caused an epidemic of depression.

We've come to think that a good time has to mean spending a lot of money to travel and be entertained.

But we can create more fun in our own communities, rather than depending on expensive vacations to distant places to have a good time.

### **Birth of a Nation**

An example of creating collective joy for me is the many block parties we put on at the White Dog that draw a diverse crowd dancing in the street for Noche Latina and Rum & Reggae.

For many years on the Fourth of July eve we have the Liberty and Justice for All ball, and I put on a skit called the Birth of the Nation. First comes a Revolutionary War fellow with his drum, then a midwife with her lantern, and then I come out dressed as a pregnant colonial woman, with a clown face and a little colonial hat. And a sign on my back that says, "George Washington slept here!" My midwife delivers twins, a white woman and a black woman. One says "Justice," one says "Liberty," and they are dressed in red, white, and blue, They hop onto the stage and do a tap dance to "Yankee Doodle Dandy." Then we wheel out the Statue of Liberty. We light our sparklers and sing "God Bless America." It's very patriotic.

These are all celebrations that increase happiness and build community, and historically have often been put on by locally owned businesses – the town grocery store held the community holiday party in the town where I grew up,

and I'm sure many of you grew up in places where the local milk company or hardware store throws a community event.

Building a sustainable and inclusive local economy is not only about our responsibility to future generations,

But also about reconnecting to place and with each other as we build community,

creating local identity through local musicians, artists and creative entrepreneurs,

and increasing happiness and collective joy that comes from working collaboratively toward a shared vision.

To summarize:

**The Local Living Economies Movement is about:**

Maximizing relationships, not maximizing profits  
Growth of consciousness and creativity, not brands and market-share,  
Democracy and decentralized ownership, not concentrated wealth.  
A living return, not the highest return.  
A fair price, not the lowest price.  
Sharing, not hoarding,  
Simplicity, not gluttony,  
Life serving, not self-serving.  
Partnership, not domination.  
Cooperation based, not competition based.  
Win-win exchange, not win-lose exploitation.  
Family farms, not factory farms.  
Bio-diversity, not monocrops.  
Cultural diversity, not monoculture.  
Creativity, not conformity.  
Slow food, not fast food.  
Our bucks, not Starbucks.  
Our mart, not Wal-Mart.  
Valuing life over life-style.  
And as the Earth Charter says,  
"Being more, not having more."

**Protecting what we love**

At its heart, our movement for local living economies is about love. And its love that can overcome the fear that many may feel in the hard days ahead brought on by climate change and environmental collapse.

In my own experience, it was my love for animals that motivated me to challenge the factory farm system and begin building a local living economy in my region.

Our power comes from protecting what we love – love of place, love of life – people, animals, nature, all of life on our beautiful planet Earth.

And I would say, for the entrepreneurs amongst us – it's also about a love of business. Business has been corrupted as an instrument of greed rather than one of service to the common good. Yet we know that business is beautiful when we put our creativity and care into producing a product or service needed by our community.

Our materialistic society has desensitized us to the suffering that underlies our industrial economic system.

We're also desensitized by a false idea of masculinity based on control and domination. We need a more feminine caring, nurturing approach to life – to bring forth the goddess in each of us, men and women, to allow peace and harmony to come into our world.

We must open our hearts and eyes and ears - to hear the cry of the pigs in the crates, of a cow for her calf, of animals in laboratories, in the fur industry.

To feel the suffering of men, women and children enslaved in sweatshops, in the rug industry, in diamond and coalmines, and chocolate production. The suffering of migrant workers in slaughterhouses and pesticide-soaked industrial farms.

The suffering of the people of Iraq, of Nigeria, of the rainforest tribes - everywhere where there is oil and natural resources to exploit, and fight wars over.

Let us hear the cry of the whales, of the polar bears, of the trees, of the natural world that is dying around us.

What provides the energy and passion for all we must do in this movement is simply to allow ourselves to love what we love.

And in so doing, find our place as humans in the family of life.

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