

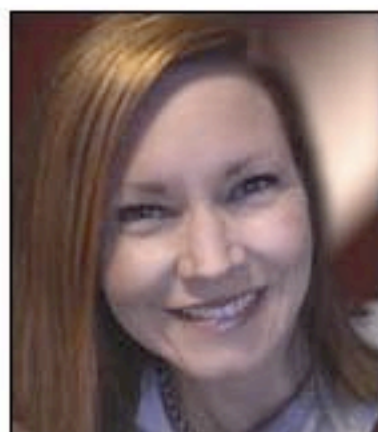


Habitat goes 'green,' and faith groups help

By Rhonda Bonfield

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Doesn't it always happen that every year at Thanksgiving, someone passes out on the living-room floor in front of the TV after too much holiday fare? Well, last year, having been a guest instead of a host for once, that person was me. We had eaten by 2 p.m., and by 3, I had found myself thinking up excuses to rent a movie, go home and recover on the sofa. Waddling through the video store, I browsed the 'classics' for something that might feel like the holidays. Instead, I found myself in the 'documentaries' reading the DVD jacket for Al Gore's film on climate change, *An Inconvenient Truth*. Why not? I'd heard the hype so thought I'd give it a try. Despite my efforts to pay attention and the fact that I've considered myself an environmentalist since about the third grade, the combination of tryptophan and Gore's earnest yet monotonous delivery put me to sleep within the first 30 minutes.

Habitat's first 'Green Build'

Fast-forward a year. Environmentalism is no longer reserved for discussion by academics. In October of 2007, Habitat for Humanity of Forsyth County broke ground on its first 'Green Build.' Thoughtful design will save the new homeowners thousands of dollars in a relatively short amount of time by reducing utility bills. By building with nontoxic materials and recycling building waste, construction of the Green Build will leave a small footprint on the home's immediate surroundings while at the same time providing a safe dwelling for the family.

In 1976, Habitat for Humanity's founder, Millard Fuller, had a vision of making "adequate, affordable shelter a matter of conscience and action." His philosophy, "the theology of the hammer," bridged spiritual differences, bringing diverse groups of volunteers together for a common purpose. It's no surprise that over 30 years later, Habitat for Humanity has become a leader in the movement toward safe, sustainable building practices.

Confronts spiritual needs

The numbers tell us that green building makes sense. But we don't typically hear about how green building addresses the spiritual needs of a community. Faith-based organizations in the Winston-Salem area have generously stepped up to the plate in support of the Green Build with time, energy and financial commitment. In the fall of 2006, several churches and student groups began talking about a Green Build. St. Anne's Episcopal Church, the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Winston-Salem, Temple Emanuel and Parkway United Church of Christ joined Wake Forest Baptist Church, a major supporter of the project. They agreed on the need.

Habitat for Humanity's 30 years of service indicates that human need and social justice are two reasons why people build homes for one another. The Rev. Tom Mann of Parkway values another dimension of social justice. He says, "Climate change is the central social-justice issue for the foreseeable future." We see its effects all over the world. "The poor will suffer the most. Green Habitat houses confront the problem from both ends - top down and bottom up."

The word 'green' now hits us on an emotional level. Today, being green is akin to being responsible, thoughtful, nurturing.

We touch the spirit when we take charge of that which is our responsibility. Rabbi Mark Strauss-Cohn of Temple Emanuel explains why his congregation has supported the Green Build. "Caring for each other and building sensitively for the Earth is a natural partnership," he said, "which is why the interfaith component with this build is so critical."

Strauss-Cohn reminds us that stewardship is commanded of us in the book of Genesis by explaining that "we are allowed to work the Earth in order to live, but we are also its guardians and caretakers. We serve the Earth - not the other way around."

This year, my Thanksgiving will include joy and gratitude that go beyond my own family, friends and material gifts. Being that I'm having family in my home this year, I doubt I'll find time to lie around on the sofa in gastronomic bliss. But my heart is full and I'll be giving thanks that I've had the opportunity to be involved in something much bigger than myself and my own daily life. I will acknowledge the efforts of others who give of their time, skills and hard-earned resources to create bounty from what lives inside their hearts.

■ Rhonda Bonfield, a mother of three, enjoys camping, kayaking and hiking in the North Carolina mountains. Since moving from Texas in 1994, she has worked as a graphic artist and writer for many environmental and social causes.