

YELLOW WOOD NOTES

An Occasional Publication
for the Benefit of
Our Clients, Colleagues, and Friends

Winter 2000

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Update on Our Work: Multi-Phased Projects

The value in our expertise and experience lies not in always knowing the answers, but in knowing how to find out in a manner which assists our clients in making decisions and taking actions appropriate to the results they really want. Because much of our work is undertaken from the perspective of not knowing the answer, we try to design interventions in a way which allows for clients to actively work with the information we generate and make decisions about how to proceed in stages. This method often generates the opportunity for long-term relationships fostered through multi-phased projects.

Burlington Public Market

In the spring of 1999, Yellow Wood Associates began working with the Burlington Community Land Trust and a local task force to assist in determining the feasibility of establishing a year-round public market in Burlington Vermont. YWA's role in the initial feasibility assessment was to determine the capacity and interest of local agricultural producers and to lead a series of producer focus groups to discuss various organizational models for ownership and management of the market.

Recently, the City of Burlington announced that they would make a downtown site available to accommodate the public market and an expanded local cooperative food store. This announcement clears the way for Phase II of our work with groups of agricultural producers who wish to work together to establish a full-time, year-round presence in the market slated for opening in the spring of 2001. We will identify and provide services to up to twenty producer groups in key product categories: meats (includ-

ing poultry) and butcher, vegetables & small fruits, dairy products & eggs, apples, specialty foods/processed foods (non-dairy), maple, honey, fish, fiber, skins, herbs & herbal products (soaps, etc.), flowers & nursery.

Our work with producer groups, many of whom have limited experience with retail marketing, will begin by helping them assess their readiness to participate in a year-round public market. Once interested producer groups have determined their strengths and weaknesses, Yellow Wood Associates will coordinate the delivery of services from a variety of technical assistance providers in both public and private sectors. Our goal is to have at least four producer groups ready to go on opening day.

The Economic Impact of Canada on Clinton County, New York -- Take 3

In October we presented the results of our third assessment, conducted for the Plattsburgh North Country Chamber of Commerce, of the economic impact of Canada on Clinton County, New York. The assessment uses a methodology invented by YWA to determine economic impact in tourism, banking, retail, accounting, temporary services, energy, marinas, culture and education, export sales, and real estate in terms of dollar value of sales, sales and property taxes, employment and income. The total value (without multipliers) for calendar year 1998 was \$1.4 billion. The Chamber has the full report on the web at www.canamconnection.com. Next time around, we'll be including the health care sector as well.

Update on Our Work: Multi-Phased Projects

Northeast Stewardship Project

Yellow Wood Associates is about to enter the third phase in our work with the Northeast Stewardship Project (NESP), a non-profit group in northeastern Vermont whose mission includes activities to support the region's timber-based economy. NESP originally contracted with YWA in 1997 to conduct best-practices research in relation to three project ideas. As the result of our initial research, NESP hired YWA to conduct a study to determine the feasibility of developing a regional logger training center in northeastern Vermont.

Our Phase II research included two activities - an inventory of existing training programs and courses offered in the region and a survey to assess the demand for and perception of logger training programs. We found that there are already well-established and well-regarded training programs for loggers throughout the region. However, only logger safety training in connection with

insurance programs offers any follow up to ensure that training actually results in changes in the way loggers do their jobs. In general, our informants thought a regional logger training center impractical.

Based upon the results of our Phase II research, we proposed that the Northeast Stewardship Project investigate the feasibility of developing a voluntary logger certification program which would provide standards and conduct performance-based field evaluations. A logger certification program would give loggers a tool for working more effectively with landowners and open new markets for their services. At the same time, an independent certification process would build upon, lend credibility to, and create demand for existing logger training providers.

During Phase III of this project, beginning this winter, YWA will work with NESP and potential partners to explore interest in and willingness to implement a performance-based certification program for loggers.

About Yellow Wood Notes . . .

Yellow Wood Notes is a twice yearly publication of Yellow Wood Associates, Inc. Our purpose in publishing this newsletter is to maintain contact and share ideas with friends, colleagues, and clients. We appreciate your feedback and suggestions.

Yellow Wood Associates, Inc. is a private, for-profit firm specializing in rural economic research and training for community capacity building. Our core purpose is to educate rural communities about their development choices. Our clients include small towns; non-profit organizations; federal, state, and county governments; foundations; and the private sector.



Estimating Demand for Wooden Window Restoration

Walter Phelps has been building new wooden windows and selling window hardware in Vermont for over twenty years. He thinks Vermont needs qualified window restoration specialists. The demand is there, the technology is available, the hardware is available and the methods are available for upgrading historic windows. What's missing are well trained, specialized individuals and methodologies.

The New Leaf Cooperative Enterprise Program, a program of the Burlington Community Land Trust, is considering developing a cooperative specializing in the restoration and maintenance of wooden windows. New Leaf hired Yellow Wood Associates to estimate the demand for services.

Because of the specialized nature of this project Yellow Wood partnered with John Leeke, a wooden window restoration expert with over 26 years of both hands-on and consulting experience. Our approach included constructing a description of the industry, identifying market opportunities, and evaluating the competition. To complete these tasks, we

conducted over fifty interviews with key contacts who own, manage, restore or are involved with the restoration of buildings with wooden windows. We used census data on the age of housing units within the study area to estimate the overall size of the residential market for wooden window restoration.

Our research suggests that the main market for wooden window restoration and maintenance is the non-profit development community. A primary means of funding the rehabilitation of affordable housing in Vermont, the *Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit*, requires that wooden windows be kept where possible. Secondary markets include the restoration of unique and oversized windows that are too expensive to replace, like those found in older institutional buildings - universities, government buildings, churches, and town halls. Private home owners are an additional market, but are more likely to replace their old wooden windows. Homeowners are not confined by historic preservation guidelines and their windows are standard size, for which there are many affordable new replacement models.

Winter Reading

Ethan Frome by Edith Wharton is a poignant story of love, loss and wasted lives, with a cruelly ironic twist at the end, set amidst the bleak chill of frozen rural New England. Wharton's style is artistic and eminently clear. The characters are well defined, particularly Ethan. Vivid descriptions of nature evoke the beauty and icy desolation of the landscape. ~ Mary Nieman

Bill Bryson saved my sanity during a recent 10 hour layover at Dulles Airport. (Yup, you read that right, 10 hours!) His book, *A Walk in the Woods*, is a laugh-out-loud funny rendition of life on the Appalachian Trail as experienced by two middle-aged men. I highly recommend it. ~ Shanna Ratner

Puzzler

Chiasmus (ki-AZ-muhs)

A rhetorical inversion of the second of two parallel structures as in *Never Let A Fool Kiss You, or a Kiss Fool You*, a plethora of chiasmi compiled by Dr. Mardy Grothe (Viking Press, 1999). Chiasmus are an effective way to spice up verbalization on virtually any topic. The examples below are taken from Grothe's website: <http://chiasums.com/>. See if you can identify the famous individuals responsible. Answers on Page 10.

Chiasmus in sports:

1) I spent a year training for a career that was over in a week. Joe spent one week training for a career that lasted twelve years.

Chiasmus in literature:

2) Many people genuinely do not wish to be saints, and it is probable that some who achieve or aspire to sainthood have never felt much temptation to be human beings.

Chiasmus in rural romance:

3) The odds are good, but the goods are odd.

Chiasmus in science:

4) The spirit of the universe is at once destructive and creative - it creates while it destroys, and destroys while it creates, and we must inevitably resign ourselves to this.

Chiasmus in economics:

5) Instead of putting their money where their mouth is, some people just put their mouth where the money is.

Chiasmus in politics:

6) No woman has ever so comforted the distressed - or so distressed the comfortable.

Chiasmus among critters:

7) Time's fun when you're having flies.

b b b b b

New Evaluation Model Maps Business Relationships

Yellow Wood Associates recently designed a unique evaluation tool to use with the 23 business groups who have received assistance during the Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund's first two years of operation. The tool first assesses the development and status of networks between groups of businesses and their suppliers, employees, product developers, markets, technical assistants, and financiers. Then the tool examines relationships between network building and outcomes in terms of improvements in job quality, the environment, and the connections between businesses and communities.

Our working hypothesis for the VSJF evaluation is that every successful business is embedded in a network of relationships, and, the stronger the network, the more

sustainable, flexible, and resilient the business. Businesses who received support from the Fund were asked to map their networks, before and after they received assistance, and to describe in words how their networks developed.

Preliminary analysis shows that successful projects more than doubled the size of their networks overall. Successful projects had, on average, 21 contacts in their networks. Failed projects had just under 9 contacts on average. Successful projects tend to create redundancy in their networks, i.e. more than one supply relationship, etc. In fact, 90% of the successful projects connections were multiple while only 33% of the connections of failed projects were multiple. VSJF will use the results of the evaluation to improve and target their technical assistance services to grantees.

YWA to be Northern Forest Field Station for the National Resource Center for Rural People in Forest Communities

Two years ago, YWA co-developed a proposal with the National Network of Forest Practitioners, Forest Trust of Santa Fe, NM, Mountain Association for Community Economic Development of Berea, KY, and Forest Community Research of Taylorsville, CA. Our proposal was submitted in response to an opportunity presented by the Fund for Rural America to develop regional centers which would provide technical services for rural communities. Shortly after our proposal was received in Washington, the Fund collapsed. Recently, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced a new rural initiative which included funding for the five top proposals from the previously aborted process. Four of the five national centers to receive funds to cover start-up and operation over four years will be hosted by land grant universities. Ours is the only one that is citizen-based.

The National Resource Center for Rural People in Forest Communities is actually a decentralized network with four field stations under the supervision of the applicants named above. The Center will support citizen-based research in order to address a wide range of economic, environmental, and social concerns and opportunities among communities with forest land. Where appropriate, the Center will provide technical assistance through the project implementation phase.

Each field station will operate with a high degree of autonomy based on a shared set of principles and operating rules. The National Network of Forest Practitioners will coordinate, but not

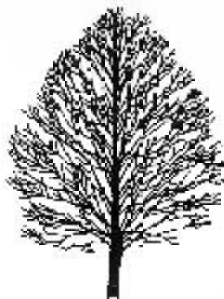
direct, the work of all four stations, offering opportunities for cross-site learning and exchange.

YWA will be forming a Bioregional Advisory Council of citizens from northern forest communities to set the agenda for our field station. We anticipate our work will include training in participatory research, capacity building, research support, information development and sharing, and assistance to communities in networking with existing resources and expertise. We will also work with the

Bioregional Advisory Council to identify 3-4 communities who would like to collaborate with us on participatory research projects related to forests.

The Fund for Rural America was a highly competitive national process. We are proud to have been selected and eager to help demonstrate the positive power of citizen research as an alternative to the traditional expert-driven approach.

For more information about the Center as a whole, please contact Thomas Brendler at the National Network of Forest Practitioners, 617-338-7821, tbrendler@nnf.org. For more information on the Northern Forest Field Station, contact YWA.



Species represented by the silhouette on this page is Sugar maple, on Page 8 is Red Pine, and on Page 11 is American Elm.

Participatory Research Offers More Than Information

Participatory research, a model which lies at the core of the proposed Center, is a democratic method for identifying information needs, and then producing, collecting, and analyzing information in a way which is directly responsive to problems framed by a community. The model recognizes that local people's information, knowledge, experiences, and perspectives are integral to community identity and capacity. Participatory research attempts to eliminate the barrier between the researchers and the researched by the participation of community members themselves in the process of gaining and creating the knowledge they need.

Key characteristics of participatory research are participation by those being studied or those who will use the information, inclusion of popular knowledge, focus on power and empowerment, consciousness-raising and education of participants, and political action. Ownership of the research and action is typically shared between professional researchers, experts, community members, and community-based organizations.

An example: A community in Maine wanted to get information on the pollution status of its clam beds so that they could take steps to have the beds reopened in a timely manner. One member of the group contacted the government agency that keeps the records and got through to the individual record-keeper. She told him that, although they collect the information on clam beds by town, her computer program was unable to retrieve the information on that basis and she didn't have permission from her superiors to do so. Nonetheless, once she understood the reason for the request -

the community wanted to expedite opening the beds by taking their own measures more frequently than the state - she found a way to get them the information they needed. Now they know how to get that information on a regular basis. By changing the flow of information, the community became empowered to act in new ways that resulted in improved quality and use of natural resources.

By collaborating in the research process, participants develop the capacity to determine root causes of apparent problems and issues by structuring information according to community logic and need. Not only do participants gain the information they really need to support actions important to the community, but they also gain critical thinking skills for improved problem solving and decision making, new relationships within the community and with outside "experts", and enhanced collective knowledge.

Participatory or community-based research is an international phenomenon more frequently practiced outside the U.S. The Netherlands, home to several dozen community-based research centers, or science shops, is credited with pioneering the model. Centers of community-based research in the U.S. are developing slowly, usually at arm's length from universities and without explicit government encouragement. The Loka Institute of Amherst, Massachusetts, a non-profit whose mission is to democratize science and technology, has begun to build a worldwide Community Research Network. Contact them at www.loka.org, Loka@amherst.edu, 413-559-5860.

See the Forest Pilot Communities Launch Local Efforts

Vermont pilot communities, Huntington and Starksboro, completed the final workshops in YWA's 5-session **See the Forest** program by launching their own local efforts. The Huntington Conservation Commission will coordinate a project to gather and distribute information about local forest management attitudes and practices and compile a directory of local forest-based businesses. Starksboro will introduce the ELF environmental program in their elementary school through a partnership between the school and the conservation commission and create a citizen's committee to prepare a management plan for their municipal forest.

Robert Turner of the Starksboro Conservation Commission noted recently that the group's new initiatives are allowing them to reach and involve a broader, more diverse group of local residents. By supporting the ELF program at the school, the Commission has forged a direct link between community resource issues and environmental education. A new collaboration with the library board will enable local residents to explore their relationship with the landscape by taking part in a series of workshops.

The Huntington Conservation Commission used a portion of the funds they received for participating in **See the Forest** to hire a coordinator to oversee their efforts. They have produced a draft directory which lists local forest-based businesses in primary wood processing (logging, milling, trucking), secondary processing (cabinet makers, wood workers, and home builders), and non-timber forest products such as wreaths and

maple sugaring. A regional monthly newspaper has agreed to publish either a series of articles or a special edition featuring landowners who manage their forest land sustainably for multiple uses.

See the Forest participants from both pilot communities have reported using the materials, tools, and experience from the program to form more effective working relationships, identify the information they need, and find ways to gather it. Michaela Stickney, a participant from Huntington, reports that the influence of **See the Forest** shows up in a variety of ways including more thoughtful questioning in discussion of issues and the use of best practices research to find out what other communities are doing and how it works.

Funding for developing **See the Forest** and piloting its use in two Vermont communities was provided by a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program. While we anticipate that the overall process and content outline for the program will remain relatively constant, we are aware that the specific content and, in some instances, the process as well, must be modified to fit communities in other areas of the country. We are currently writing an application for Phase II funding from the SBIR program to request funds to pay for the research and development necessary to adapt the **See the Forest** materials for use in 7-8 other states.

Continued on Page 9



Continued from Page 8

If we receive the Phase II funding, we anticipate being ready to offer **See the Forest** to communities in three target states beginning in the Spring of 2001, and to one additional state every four to six months after that for a period of three

years. At the end of three years, we will be in a position to replicate the program within the 7-8 states for which materials are developed (plus Vermont), and raise funds to modify the materials for additional states.

What is your earliest experience in the woods?

We often begin our workshops, training sessions, or group facilitation with a period of individual reflection and writing. We have found that this activity helps participants to gather their thoughts and personal experience and bring them to bear on the topic at hand. When participants share their personal reflections and experiences, they often learn things about each other that they would never otherwise have known. This can create an atmosphere more conducive to trust and dialogue as opposed to polarized debate. Sometimes we provide a provocative question to suggest new avenues for exploration during the discussion which follows. We begin our **See the Forest** workshop and presentations by asking participants to reflect upon the following: *“What is the earliest experience with the forest that you can recall?”*

A sampling of the memories we've heard in response:

I collected seeds in the forest and planted them at home to see what would happen

Mushroom hunting

Ran away into the forest, got lost, survived by stealing from neighbor's garden

Discovered ginseng in the wild

Transplanted forest plants to the backyard-created a mini-arboretum

Found a motherlode paw-paw tree

I was carried in my parent's pack basket until they started collecting seedlings to replant in our yard at home. Then I had to walk.

Gathering medicinal and edible plants with grandmother

When our family would go out to cut firewood, I'd look for the tallest, biggest stump left, climb on top of it, and sing Kate Smith songs.

Update on Our Work: Forensic Research

Milton Testimony Delivers

Christmas came about a week early this year when the Vermont District #4 Environmental Commission released their decision on the Town of Milton's proposed sewer expansion. The Commission denied the town's Act 250 permit, arguing, among other things, that Milton had underestimated the rates of growth the Town will face with the sewer project, leaving out, for example, the impact of Husky (a large manufacturer who recently relocated to Milton); failed to address the economic impact of the sewer expansion on the region, including nearby towns that would be affected; produced an inadequate fiscal impact analysis which provides no quantifiable standard of service and ignores many of the harder to quantify secondary growth costs such as foregone investment in the Town's core village area, loss of green space, impact on affordable housing, increase in non-point source pollution, loss of visual resources, and increased costs of public transportation from scattered development.

In addition, the Commission found that, "contrary to the requirements under 9(H) [one of Act 250's permitting criteria], Milton did not analyze the direct and indirect costs of the sewer project to state taxpayers." Milton argued that since the capital costs of the sewer project would be financed by state and federal dollars, no direct costs would be imposed on town property taxpayers. The Commission's decision strongly rejects this approach, insisting that the cost to state taxpayers, not simply local taxpayers, must be weighed against the overall benefits of the project.

These points were brought to the Commission's attention by YWA who represented the Conservation Law Foundation in the Town of Milton Act 250 hearings. Milton is currently deciding whether or not to appeal the Commission's decision.

Answers to Puzzlers on Page 5: 1) Olympic Gold Medal winner Bruce Jenner when asked how he'd compare his career with Joe Namath's; 2) George Orwell, "Reflections on Gandhi"; 3) An Alaskan bartender asked the odds of finding a good man in that state; 4) Albert Schweitzer; 5) Dr. Mardy Grothe; 6) Clare Booth Luce referring to Eleanor Roosevelt; 7) Kermit the Frog

Social Capital and Behavioral Norms

Shanna Ratner was an attendee at the Saguaro Seminar's Social Capital Measurement Workshop at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University in October, 1999. The purpose of the seminar, convened by Robert Putnam, was to assist in developing a social capital community benchmark survey to be conducted on a national basis.

The survey is intended to help communities assess their levels of social capital and compare themselves with others. One of the many fascinating

concepts explored at the seminar was the importance of including norms of behavior in assessing social capital. These include both expectations of public behavior of civility and assistance (e.g. do you expect to be helped if you run out of gas in your neighborhood?) and expectations of collective action (e.g. do you expect the people in your neighborhood to organize themselves to address a common need or threat?). What are the behavioral norms in your community? How have they changed over the past decade or two?

Staff Notes

We wish to welcome Mary E. Nieman to our staff as our new Administrative Assistant/Office Manager. Mary moved to Vermont from a small town in New York where she was the Administrative Assistant for Financial Management for a local non-profit organization. Mary has over 12 years experience in the administrative field and currently attends Champlain College working towards her Bachelor's Degree in Business Management.

We're also pleased to welcome Adele LeRoyer to our staff as Research Intern. Adele graduated with a degree in Geography from McGill University in Montreal in 1983. She then worked for 14 years in the Marketing Department of *The Montreal Gazette*, most recently as the

From left: Sam Ratner, Alyssa Nieman, Mary Nieman, Shanna Ratner, Debra Mason, Adele LeRoyer.

senior research analyst. In 1997 she left *The Gazette* to go back to McGill, where she completed a Master's Degree in Urban Planning last fall.

Adding Value from Stump to Mill

Shanna Ratner led a workshop at the Vermont Wood Products Manufacturers Annual Meeting on Adding Value from Stump to Mill. Ratner pointed out that, as important as the concept of a value-adding chain may be, it can obscure the fact that value begins not with the producer or the forest, but with the customer. Participants in the workshop practiced their marketing skills by interviewing each other to determine what they each really wanted or needed in a particular type of product. Then they considered what they, as producers, could do differently to help their customers solve problems and meet needs. This approach, different as it is from trying to sell someone on what you already produce, opens up new opportunities for creative expression and business development.

Community Forestry

Debra Mason led workshops based upon YWA's community forestry program, See the Forest, at annual meetings of the National Network of Forest Practitioners (NNFP) and the New England Association of Resource Conservation & Development

(RC&D) Councils. Workshop participants shared their earliest experiences in the woods and tested their knowledge by identifying the silhouettes of Northeastern trees and matching tree species to the corresponding wood grains. The workshops were designed to showcase materials and activities designed for See the Forest and to generate discussion about how organizations might participate in offering the program to communities. Can you identify the species of the tree shown here and on Pages 6 and 8? (Answers on Page 6)



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