

YELLOW WOOD NOTES

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

Winter 2010

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We Welcome Your Comments

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Update On Our Work

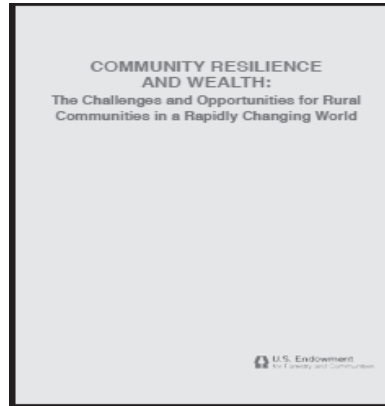
Rural Workforce Development

The Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County, Wisconsin received funding from The National Fund for Workforce Solutions (NFWS) to design and implement this workforce innovation project. The target area for this project, which is funded for three years through September 2011, is northern Adams and Greater South Wood Counties with a secondary service area aligned with Mid-State Technical College's district (parts of all eight counties). It is one of only two rural workforce development initiatives funded by NFWS. The Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County selected Yellow Wood Associates as their local evaluator.

Workforce Central is based on guiding principles that: 1) effective workforce solutions require employer and employee involvement; 2) investing in individuals is a community responsibility and opportunity; 3) policy advocacy is essential for changing workforce development; and 4) a commitment to inclusive, value-based decision-making is necessary. A collaborative effort between and among a diverse group of funders (Funders Council) and individuals with expertise in adult education and training, social services, career development, community and economic development, employers, employees, and representatives of labor, faith-based and minority organizations in the region (Community Advisory Council) are responsible for project guidance and provide the basis for inclusive, value-based decision-making.

Our work with the Community Foundation of Greater South Wood County began with You Get What You Measure® workshops which clarified goals and key leverage indicators for Workforce Central. Work includes a network

and gap analysis of service providers with services related to workforce development.



Community Resilience

Community Resilience and Wealth: The Challenges and Opportunities for Rural Communities in a Rapidly Changing World is now available at <http://www.usendowment.org/communityresilience.html>. The report by Shanna Ratner and Susanne Moser explores the issue of community resilience from the perspective of literature and key informant interviews with 25 rural development practitioners from around the country. We identify stages of community resilience and investigate the role of institutions, policies, leadership and culture in creating the capacity for resilient response to stressors. The relationship between community wealth and community resilience is also explored. Appendices contain tools, selected research, an essay on the historical evolution and meaning of the concept of resilience, and a list of interviewees. Our colleague, Robert Turner, says, "I've been savoring it, sharing it, and generally finding it to be one of the more inspiring and energizing pieces of any kind that I've read in some time."

Update On Our Work

Vermont's Environmental Sector

Yellow Wood was engaged by the Vermont Environmental Consortium (VEC) to define Vermont's environmental sector; survey the sector to improve the understanding of the workforce education and training needs of these firms; and survey schools, organizations and businesses providing environmental education and training in Vermont. This project is particularly timely in light of the emphasis on workforce development given the economic downturn, combined with the increased attention to the green economy and green jobs. Survey results from over 250 firms in Vermont's environmental sector and 100 education and training providers highlight the fit or lack thereof between the needs and the education and training programs and resources

available in Vermont and have supplied important baseline information identifying opportunities, challenges and gaps that can be filled in Vermont's green economy. The final report on these findings has been completed and is available at <http://www.vecgreenvalley.org/VEC%20Report%20on%20VTs%20Environmental%20Sector.pdf>. VEC will feature workforce development opportunities at their next annual conference. Additional customized data analysis will be available for a fee. Contact vec@norwich.edu for more information.



About Yellow Wood Associates & Yellow Wood Notes . . .

Yellow Wood Notes is a twice yearly publication of Yellow Wood Associates, Inc. We publish this newsletter 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 since 1985. We provide clients with research services including feasibility studies and Green Community Technologies®; training and facilitation services including See the Forest®, You Get What You Measure® and Home Town Competitiveness. Our clients include small towns, nonprofit organizations, federal, state, and county governments, foundations, and the private sector. Yellow Wood Associates are Shanna Ratner, Principal; Melissa Levy, Associate; Samantha Dunn, Associate; Rob Petrini, Associate; and Ginger Weil, Office Manager.



YELLOW WOOD
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Update On Our Work

Wealth Creation

Yellow Wood continues to be involved in shaping this exciting initiative supported by the Ford Foundation. Based on lessons learned by the Working Group, we helped develop an application for place-based work in Central Appalachia.

Four initiatives have been approved for funding and will begin in January 2010. They each involve creating and testing value propositions and developing demand-driven value chains that intentionally create six forms of wealth: individual, intellectual, social, built, natural, and financial. The four initiatives are based on collaborations with participants throughout the value chains. The Federation of Appalachian Housing Enterprises (FAHE) is leading a collaborative effort to create a sustainable industry around green housing that is locally owned and controlled. Rural Action is working on a green forest products value chain. The Central Appalachian Network (CAN) is building regional agricultural value chains, and the Mountain Association for Community Economic Development (MACED) is developing the regional energy economy through energy efficient building retrofits and promotion of renewable energy businesses. Within a year, a new set of place-based initiatives will be funded in the South and then, a year later, in the colonias on the Texas/Mexico border.

The latest publication in the Wealth Creation series is *Keeping Wealth Local*. You can find it at www.yellowwood.org/wealthcreation.aspx.

Janet Topolsky of the Aspen Institute calls it "*one of a handful of truly useful papers I've seen in 20 years.*" If you would like to be included in the email list for publication alerts related to this project, please email Melissa@yellowwood.org.



Wealth Creation in Rural Communities

Wallace Writeshop

In November, Shanna Ratner facilitated the first of two values-based value chain writeshops for the Wallace Center at Winrock International. The purpose of the writeshop was to develop content for tools to assist intermediaries in building value chains so that more healthy food gets to market. The writeshop brought together a remarkable group of researchers and practitioners who participated in an arduous but fruitful process to capture their best thinking about what works and what does not in implementing values-based value chains. Products will be available after the second write shop, scheduled for summer 2010.

The writeshop format was invented by Paul Mundy who works in international development. Thanks to Jim Barham at USDA, who experienced a writeshop overseas and saw its applicability to Wallace, we were able to bring this approach to life in a modified format in the U.S. For more information on writeshops, visit www.mamud.com/writeshop.htm.

Biomass Energy Roundtable

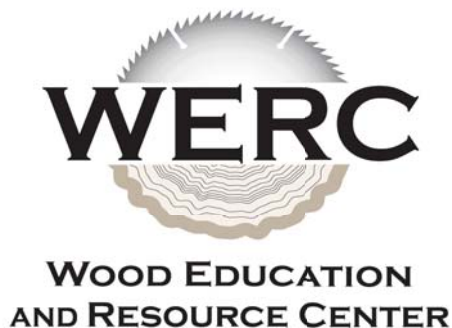
Shanna Ratner was an invited participant in the Hubbard Brook Roundtable 4: Establishing a Wood Energy Cooperative in September 2009 at the Hubbard Brook Experiment Station in New Hampshire. The Roundtable resulted in a white paper called *OUR CARBON, OUR COMMUNITIES: A community-based vision for using wood biomass in an era of climate change that emphasizes the importance of community-scale biomass utilization for thermal energy*. It was remarkable to see how readily the very diverse group of roundtable participants including industry, large landowners, land trusts, extension educators and others came to agreement about appropriate scale and highest and best use of woody biomass for communities in New England. The paper has been sent to legislators in the New England states. Let us know if you would like to receive a copy.

USFS Wood Energy

Work has begun on the multi-state biomass feasibility projects for the Wood Education Resource Center (WERC) of the U.S. Forest Service. Yellow Wood and Richmond Energy Associates completed two feasibility analyses in the Catskills region of New York and are working with project partners, Wilson Engineering, to help identify the best candidates for biomass heating in Missouri's Fuels for Schools program. Each report generated includes site specific fuel savings projections based on historic fuel consumption; capital cost assumptions (including life cycle costing); and suggestions and recommendations on next steps for decision-makers to take based on site visits, data collection, interviews and analysis. We continue to work with WERC to provide institutions and communities clear assessments of whether or not a biomass heating project makes practical and financial sense.

Community Forestry

In October, we were pleased to facilitate two community forest workshops in Bangor and Bath on behalf of the Maine Association of Conservation Commissions, the Maine Forest Service, and the Community Forest Collaborative. These highly participatory workshops are designed to: increase the awareness of the history, role, value and benefits of community forests; provide concrete examples of community forests at work in a variety of kinds of communities; introduce people to tools and strategies for community forest acquisition and management; and create understanding of the civic infrastructure need to own and manage a community forest. They bring together people from communities with actively managed community forests and those who aspire to have community forests. Participants come away with lots of ideas and a network of supporters and resources to draw on. These workshops are a continuation of our See the Forest® process developed many years ago as a way to help communities recognize and capture benefits from forests.



Yellow Wood Associates Turns 25

To gain some insight into the past 25 years, we interviewed our founder and principal, Shanna Ratner.



Q: How do you feel about Yellow Wood turning 25?

Shanna: Amazed, happy, and very fortunate to have been able to support myself and others doing something I love for this long. Also, a little old. It's amazing how this work continues to evolve and progress. The longer one stays at it, the more it's possible to see what changes and what stays the same and how much mental models and a vision of what is possible matters in development work.

Q: How has the mix of work at Yellow Wood changed from its beginnings to now?

Shanna: It's changed a lot. When we started, we focused on research, trying to understand how rural economies really work and how the natural resource-base and related activities figured in. We worked on lots of unique, mostly smallish, projects. It took about ten years to figure out who our market was and who was interested in the work we wanted to do. At about the same time, I was invited to become a member of the Aspen Institute's Learning Cluster on Rural Community Capacity Building. That was a real eye opening experience that lasted about six years. It made me more aware of the importance of process in our work and made me pay attention not only to what we were doing but to how we were helping others work together. Figuring out how to help people learn together in a participatory way has been a very rewarding part of this work for me. The other big change has been in learning how to develop replicable processes like You Get What You Measure and Green

Community Technologies. There's tremendous power in self-customizing frameworks that give structure without dictating results. It's really fun and satisfying to create these kinds of tools and approaches and see others use them successfully.

Q: How has this business changed during the last 25 years?

Shanna: The business of Yellow Wood has changed a lot. We had no staff for our first four or five years. Then I started hiring a string of assistants. As we grew, we brought on subcontractors. At one point I hired a management consultant to help me decide whether to continue with the subcontractor model or grow our internal capacity. I decided to grow our internal capacity and that's when the real fun began. This business depends on the people working here to a large extent. The faces and competencies have changed over the years. I'd like to think we've gotten better at what we do!

Q: How are you different from 25 years ago?

Shanna: I think I'm more comfortable working with other people and less inclined toward isolation. I am also better able to bridge the abstract and the concrete and understand a lot more about what it takes to put an idea on the ground. I recognize and value different perspectives more. I understand my work as part of an historic continuum that began before I was born and will continue after I die. I am doing my part the best way I know how,

and so are lots of others, including many, many people I will never know. That's the up side. On the down side, because of the embezzlement and other experiences, I am much more aware of evil in the world and less trusting of people who come into my life until they have proven themselves.

Q: What will Yellow Wood look like 25 years from now?

Shanna: I think that will be up to the people who choose to take it forward when I move on. That won't happen for a while, I hope! I hope it will be a highly respected, vibrant, creative consultancy offering thoughtful and practical solutions to pertinent and meaningful problems facing rural communities and the regions they are part of. I think, increasingly, the emphasis will have to be on regional approaches inclusive of rural rather than on rural areas in isolation. This will apply to water, food, energy, ideas – all the basics.

Q: After 25 years in business, how do you stay inspired?

Shanna: I'm inspired by the opportunity to learn new things and think in new ways. I'm inspired when I can contribute to something that helps a client or a colleague move forward with confidence. Positive feedback is always inspiring. I also love the constant flux in which no two days are the same. I never know what challenges or opportunities a new day will bring.

Q: What have been some of your most fulfilling projects?

Shanna: There have been many fulfilling projects. One that comes to mind right now is Harpswell, Maine where we helped a citizens' group learn what they needed to know to defeat a proposed liquefied natural gas (LNG) import terminal that

would have dramatically changed their community economy, environment and sense of self. It was an honor to work with courageous and curious people willing to stand up for their way of life. The work in Harpswell was particularly satisfying because our clients went beyond being against LNG and began to articulate and organize around the kind of community they really wanted to be.

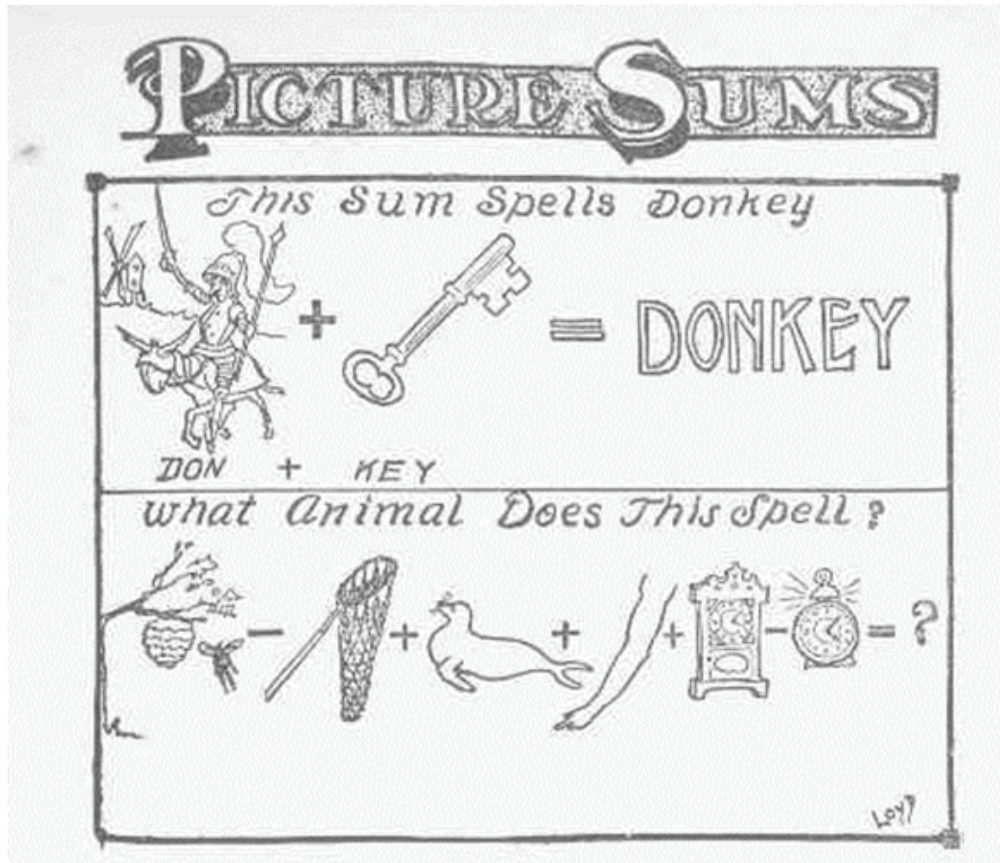
Q: What have been the biggest challenges for you over the past 25 years?

Shanna: The embezzlement was the single biggest challenge. It very nearly put us out of business. It was so discouraging to have trusted someone only to find out they had been systematically stealing from us for years. I felt like all my work and effort in building Yellow Wood was for naught. Those were the darkest days. I'm pleased to say, though, that we learned from the experience and have come out of it stronger. I've always said that the hardest part about running a business is hiring. Finding people with the right mix of skills, attitudes, background, and values to do the mix of work we do here is not easy. Right now we're blessed with a terrific staff who bring a rich mix of generational and professional perspectives to the work.

Q: If we were to survey your customers, what do you think is the one common characteristic they would all note about Yellow Wood?

No idea. We do so many different kinds of things and I think many of our clients know us through a limited lens so it's hard to tell what the common characteristic would be. It's an interesting question. One of our colleagues recently told us he hears people talk about us this way, "Yellow Wood helps communities understand who they are, how to work with each other, what their natural resources and assets are and how best they can create sustainable projects that respect the environment in a sound, safe, and secure way for future generations to enjoy."

Winter Puzzler



Update On Our Work

CAN: Using You Get What You Measure® for Strategic Planning and Evaluation

What began as a project focused on evaluation of the Central Appalachian Network and providing insights into evaluation for member organizations, through the power of You Get What You Measure®, morphed into a project focused on providing a strategic planning framework for the Central Appalachian Network. The Central Appalachian Network is a network of seven nonprofit organizations focused on making central Appalachia a more sustainable and just region.

Midway through the project, we conducted a You Get What You Measure® workshop with CAN. After this experience, CAN decided to work with us using You Get What You Measure® to develop a strategic plan for the organization for the next two years around three goals.

Goal #1: There are more strong local examples of healthy food systems in the region.

Goal #2: CAN and CAN organizations have the capacity to do regional sustainable development work through strategic partnerships.

Goal #3: There are federal Appalachian development policies that support sustainable development activities as defined by CAN.

Through You Get What You Measure, CAN was able to develop indicators, measures, and actions around those

three goals as well as a plan for measuring throughout the two year period of the plan to ensure progress toward its goals.

Sustainable Infrastructure

Yellow Wood was invited to present at the 9th Annual Catskills Local Government Day in October. Samantha Dunn presented, *Community Infrastructure: Is your town ready for change?* This interactive presentation introduced Yellow Wood's Green Community Technologies®, a unique process for rural municipalities to inventory their infrastructure and evaluate the potential for applying sound alternative technologies to their physical assets and presented the relationship between climate change and infrastructure, offering examples of sustainable infrastructure solutions. The presentation is available at: <http://www.cwconline.org/special/CommunityInfrastructure.pdf>. We are looking for partners to help us get Green Community Technologies® out to communities that need it. You can help by linking to www.greencommunitytechnologies.com. For other ways to help, please contact us. Thanks!



What's New at Yellow Wood?

Staff Updates

Goodbye Cheri

Our office manager, Cheri Hutchison, has decided to move on from Yellow Wood to explore other opportunities. We will miss her and her delicious desserts.

Welcome to Ginger Weil

Hi, my name is Ginger and I joined Yellow Wood Associates as the new Office Manager this winter. Despite the cold weather, I've received a warm welcome. I grew up in Vermont, and recently moved back to the Green Mountain State after seven years in the Midwest. I am excited that Yellow Wood has offered me the opportunity to join their office, where I will use my organizational and research skills to support their consulting work. My background is in research and information organization, and my previous work experience has been primarily in public and special libraries. After graduating with a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Carleton College in 2003, I worked for three years as a library assistant with the Illinois Supreme Court Library, where I developed skills in legal research and office organization. After receiving my Master's degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois in 2006, I moved to Minnesota. In Minnesota I worked as a library clerk for the St. Paul Public Library from 2006-2007, and as a librarian with the Washington County Library from 2007-2009. Washington County Library gave me opportunities to work in grant writing, project management, community outreach, and volunteer coordination. I collaborated on projects with schools, community organizations, governmental agencies, and non-profits.



My volunteer interests are focused on tutoring math and research skills in a variety of settings. I've tutored with the Tutorial Center and the Target Program in Manchester Center, VT; the Northfield Union of Youth and the Northfield Public Schools in Northfield, MN; and

the Student Homework and Activity Center in St. Paul, MN.

Outside of work and volunteering I'm an avid reader and enjoy poetry, mathematics, economic history, and most flavors of popular fiction. I also enjoy running and hiking, and am excited to be able to take advantage of Vermont's wonderful natural resources.

Welcome to Samantha Dunn

Hello, my name is Samantha Dunn and I joined Yellow Wood Associates this summer as an Associate. I am very excited to have made it back to Vermont, where I grew up, and put my experience in public health research and architecture to good use at Yellow Wood working with rural communities. As I was completing my Master's of Architecture I was often asked the question, "What type of architecture do you want to practice?" While Yellow Wood Associates didn't figure into my answer at the time, the mission and the work of the firm fits perfectly with my desire to use this degree to support the sustainability of rural communities in Vermont and around the country. Reinvigorated community centers can act as an antidote to our country's movement in the direction of sprawl and the negative consequences it creates.

As a trained architect and LEED Accredited Professional I bring a new perspective to the already diverse Yellow Wood team. I am particularly excited about Green Community Technologies® and the potential it has to transform rural community infrastructure by encouraging communities and their local engineers to consider systems-based alternative infrastructure solutions. Infrastructure is the backbone of any community and Green Community Technologies® challenges us all to reconsider our basic assumptions about how we approach our infrastructure issues.



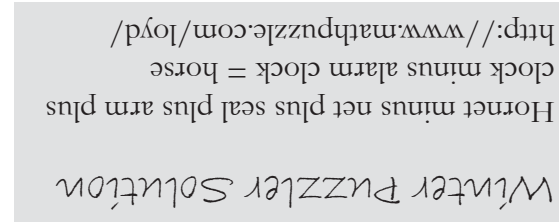
In addition to my work at Yellow Wood I am keeping my design skills honed by teaching a Community

Design class at UVM and managing renovations on our new home in Jericho. The return to Vermont has been wonderful on so many levels, including this exciting work at Yellow Wood, connecting with family and getting outside with my husband and our new rescue puppy.

You Get What You Measure®

Public Workshops

In 2010 you will find You Get What You Measure® on the road more traveled as Yellow Wood begins to offer public workshops to nonprofit, state and local agencies that are looking for ways to achieve specific goals by harnessing the knowledge, ideas, and energy of the people in their organizations. The first public workshop was offered on December 1, 2009 in Rutland Vermont and attracted agencies such as United Way of Addison County, Vermont Energy Education Program, Otter Creek Child Center, BROC (Regional Development), and Addison Central Teens. The next You Get What You Measure® public offering will be on Friday, March 12th in Washington DC, at the Hall of States, 444 North Capitol Street NW (near the Union Station Metro). Yellow Wood will also be offering Becoming a Measurement Guide training this spring. Potential dates include April 12-14 and May 17-19. For more information or to register, please contact Melissa (melissa@yellowwood.org) or Rob (rob@yellowwood.org) at Yellow Wood by email or phone (802.524.6141).



What We're Reading

Not Wanted On the Voyage, by Timothy Findley, is an imaginative retelling of the Noah's ark story. I've been on a Timothy Findley kick lately. He's an amazing Canadian novelist I discovered through a Canadian friend. I had been intrigued about this book and found it was out of print. However, I fatefully found it at my local library's annual 4th of July book sale... Very entertaining, though with an often irreverent interpretation of the religious source material. ~ Melissa



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