



# The Green Page

## Thinking it forward

### Training for the transition to the future

By Cameron Douglas

The future. Prophets have made predictions about it. Books have been written and movies have shown visions of it. No one really knows what it will be, but everyone thinks about it.

In the face of climate change and oil depletion, how can people address these issues to shape a society that can adapt? It's a daunting task, but a group of caring individuals convened for just that purpose recently at the Monterey Bay Training for Transition seminar.

Deborah Lindsay, who serves on the Pacific Grove City Council, worked with Citizens for a Sustainable Monterey County to facilitate the event. Also helping were Denyse Frischmuth of Sustainable Pacific Grove, and Paola Berthoin from Pilgrim's Way Bookstore in Carmel.

Two experienced group leaders conducted the Monterey training: Scott McKeown and Kat Steele. Both have a background of activism and experience within the corporate environment. McKeown has given and received many trainings, including several years at the Buckminster Fuller Institute. When he learned of imminent oil depletion in our lifetime, it had a profound effect on him. "My life changed," said McKeown. "There was no going back to business as usual." He became involved in the Transition Town movement and founded Transition Sebastopol, which became official in December 2008.

As a graphics and web designer, Kat Steele found herself working with creative teams in various corporations until she "hit the wall." She moved to San Francisco in hopes of finding more meaningful work. Her travels took her to Scotland where she first encountered transitional thinking. Inspired by the models presented she began studying permaculture. She is now the sustainability manager at Esalen Institute. "I've been working with the larger community to help us understand how we can live lighter on the land."

#### Fundamentals of Transition

The training is designed to equip potential transition leaders with the skills to initiate the movement where they live. Such actions would set up projects to guide the town into and through the next phase of human existence.

The Transition Town movement started in Ireland and is growing internationally. Core issues are addressed in *Transition Town Handbook* by Rob Hopkins are peak oil and climate change. Hopkins views these converging crises as an opportunity to restructure society with local resilience and ecological stewardship.

Because each locality is different, it is

not possible to market one set of plans as a "universal fit" for the transition process. And that is how it should be. A key concept is to "read the field," acknowledging what resources are available, local weather patterns, what skills are needed, etc.

The Transition movement is based on a set of ideas aimed at a bright future, achieved through less dependence on fossil fuels. But this is not as simple as it sounds. The first step is recognizing the awesome role oil currently plays in our daily lives.

#### The ultimate energy source?

So far, no known energy resource comes close to oil for cheapness and output. A single barrel of crude oil drawn from the earth performs miracles in terms of "bang for the buck." The global economy as we know it is geared to a pace where oil moves things along in superhuman fashion. In other words, one small tankful of gasoline contains as much energy as five years of one person's hard physical labor. Oil makes possible things we now take for granted, and our global economy functions as if oil will always be there.

But it may not. Let's look at oil. There are actually two dynamics: peak oil and oil depletion. They are often confused with each other. Peak oil is the point of maximum production. Oil depletion is what follows: a period of irretrievably falling reserves and supply.

M. King Hubbert developed a method called the Hubbert Peak Model to describe the peak and decline of production from oil wells, fields, regions and countries. In 1956, Hubbert predicted that U.S. oil production would peak between 1965-1970, and evidence shows that it did. Current Hubbert models indicate the world is at or near peak oil. The entire planet. Now. Today.

#### So what?

If oil depletion lies ahead, the consequences are vast and easy to predict. Gasoline becomes expensive and intermittently unavailable. Long commutes to work by car become impractical. Air and truck freight prices rise, affecting the cost of everything those machines transport.

All the speedy conveniences and global availability of goods and food would be affected.

#### Permaculture

It's a broad subject. The word is a blending of "permanent" and "agriculture," or "permanent culture." It can be defined as the design of human habitats and agriculture that mimics the relationships found in natural ecologies. The concept was first introduced by Australians Bill Mollison and David Holmgren in the 1970s. It supports the belief that nothing is separate from the earth.

Modern permaculture is essentially a system design tool that involves looking at a whole system or problem, observing how the parts relate, Mending "sick" systems with ideas learned from systems that work and seeing connections between key parts.

In permaculture, design elements are assembled so the product of one feeds the needs of another.

#### Health care

Even if the government is able to bolster health insurance, there's still work to be done. Encouraging healthy lifestyles



Deborah Lindsay pedals a blender on Jim Fowler's unique bicycle.

through stress reduction, changes in diet, proper food combining, regular exercise and broader knowledge of different healing modalities and self-care practices all play a part in creating a healthy population. These things come easily in transition, when creativity and self-reliance are emphasized.

#### One more thing

In their seminar, McKeown and Steele show a triangle of peak oil, climate change, and a third concept: economic instability. Many people believe that incomes will continue to grow indefinitely. That may not be the case, which raises more questions. If incomes hit a plateau, what mechanisms are in place to balance those incomes against the cost of living? This is a tough one. Bartering, local banking, locally grown food, goods and services can all help.

#### Letting go

The process of change is fluid. Transitionists believe that the converging crises of climate change, oil depletion and economic instability cannot be solved separately or with technological miracles. They hold the belief that a sweeping cultural change is coming, one way or another. Throughout history, humans have reacted to change in certain, predictable ways, but it is still a reaction. Transitionists aim to be proactive, to anticipate what's ahead and prepare for it by creating new customs and infrastructures.

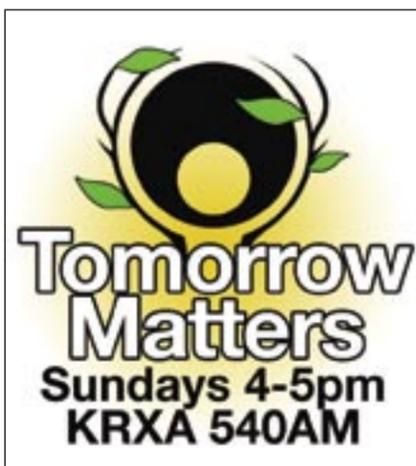
Possibilities are limitless. Jim Fowler

arrived at the training on a specially modified bicycle which featured hill-flattening gears and an extended wheelbase for more stability and comfort. "It rides like a Cadillac," Fowler reported. He even fitted the rear wheel with a unique gear drive that connects to a blender. With a frame stand holding the back tire off the ground, members of the group blended their own smoothies by pedaling the bike, using no electricity at all.

Growing food, bartering, energy descent, resilient communities, alternative energy, permaculture and ingenuity, pitted against peak oil, climate change and economic instability. People may not have a choice when it comes to the last three, but they do have a choice in how they meet the future. It is said: "If you see the storm coming, you're going to get wet." Whether or not our society prepares for the storm remains to be seen.

On October 28, 2009, Citizens for a Sustainable Monterey County became the 45<sup>th</sup> officially recognized Transition Initiative in the United States: [www.sustainablemontereycounty.org](http://www.sustainablemontereycounty.org). There are currently more than 230 Transition Towns around the world. Learn more at: [www.transitiontowns.org](http://www.transitiontowns.org) or contact Deborah Lindsay at [www.deborahlindsay.com](http://www.deborahlindsay.com). Deborah hosts "Tomorrow Matters" on KXRA 540 Sundays from 4-5 p.m.

Cameron Douglas attended the two-day training.



The class