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 is aware of change. We have had a lifetime, it had a profound effect on him. 

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 East City Coroner’s Office, and Edith Senter from Citizens for a Sustainable Monterey County to facilitate the event. Also helping were Delia Freeman 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 in hopes of finding more meaningful work.

Once, 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 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. Cunkinas 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” by 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 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 performes miracles in terms of “bang for the buck.” The global economy as we know it depends on a pace where oil moves things along in superhuman fashion. In other words, we are dependent on oil.

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 45th officially recognized Transition Initiative in the United States: www.sustainablemontereycounty.org. There are currently more than 230 Transition Towns around the world. Learn more at: www.transitiontowns.org or contact Deborah Lindsay at www.deborahliindsay. com. Deborah hosts “Tomorrow Matters” on KRXA 540 Sundays from 4-5 p.m.

Cameron Douglas attended the two-day training.

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