



Times-News

Preparing for Hendersonville's Future

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ECO NOTES



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Earlier this month a groundbreaking forum was held in Hendersonville that looked at the issues that will likely impact our community's future. The forum, sponsored by Transition Hendersonville and ECO, the Environmental and Conservation Organization, looked at resource depletion, financial uncertainty and the rich legacy of self-sufficiency left by the original settlers.

Dr. Laura Lengnick of Warren Wilson College discussed the limits of our resources, both in WNC and the nation. The nation and the world is facing peak oil, natural gas, uranium, wheat, rare earth minerals, i.e., we've reached the point of resource scarcity for many of the things we've counted on to run our lives. Coupled with resource scarcity is climate change. Whether one considers climate change "natural" or man-made, the fact is that our weather has gotten more volatile. This change which will likely affect sea level rise forcing more of the population in our direction, increased heat related stress (drought and severe weather events), and poor availability of insurance. We live in an industrial culture where virtually everything we eat and use comes from across the world which is dependent upon the constant flow of cheap energy and stable weather, both of which are now in doubt.

Nicole Foss, a world renowned economic analyst, focused her discussion on financial bubbles. According to Foss, what financial bubbles do is not create real wealth but the perception of real wealth, such as the rise in housing values over the past decade. Every credit expansion in history has been followed by an enormous debt deflation. Given that credit is over 95% of the effective money supply, the effect is there's excess claims for underlining real wealth. A comparison was made between the roaring 20's in America during the height of a credit expansion and the contraction of the 30's which lead to the Great Depression. Looking at the credit expansion currently underway, Foss explained that what we are currently facing is the largest credit expansion in human history which is bound to fall in proportion to the excesses that preceded it.

On a more positive front, Jennie Jones Giles reflected on the history of Henderson County and the surrounding counties. She recounted how everything needed to build a home, clothe and feed a family came from here. Nothing was brought in from the outside. For building, we had blacksmiths, lumber mills, brick kilns, quarries, and mines. Coats were made from bear, rabbit or raccoon and shoes were typically made from deer skin. Farmers used oxen, horses and mules for farming up through the 1950s. Everyone grew their own food, had chickens, and pigs and milk cows were prized possessions. Fishing and hunting were an essential food source.

A resilient community is one that can absorb the shocks that comes its way, whether these include economic uncertainty, energy depletion or climate change. So what would make us a more resilient community? For one, food would be grown and eaten locally. Right now, less than 1% of the things we eat come from WNC. It would also include building homes with local materials, producing more of our own goods, and re-establishing a stronger sense of community.

In terms of withstanding financial challenges on the horizon, many mountain folk weren't even aware of the depression of the 1930s because so little of the local economy was based on cash. An active bartering system that's not based on credit or cash can function even in the throes of a credit crunch. "Time banking", an exchange of time and skills, is growing in popularity around the country and in WNC. It works fairly simply: there is an exchange of time and skills based on the services the participants wish to give or wish to receive.

When we look at the future in light of these issues, it might make sense to relook at our assumptions. If we assume our food is coming from Chile or California, then protecting the health of our soil is less important. But if we're counting on this land to feed us, we need to be sure the land doesn't become a chemically-laden soup, but an organism-rich medium. If we're to depend upon our water for drinking and fishing, then the urgency of protecting the health of our streams becomes more critical since it won't come from Zephyrhills. If we're to depend on each other for the future, then we need to find ways to better communicate with each other. In a resource-limited world, we are truly our brother's keeper. Efforts like Transition Hendersonville, ECO, ASAP and others are working to build such a sustainable community. Won't you join us?

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