



An Inspiring Glimpse into the 2003 Bioneers Conference

By Rachel Stern, Earthscope Reporter

(This article was published in the Marin Scope Community Newspaper of Jan. 27 - Feb. 2, 2004)

On October 18, 2003, I was swept up in a wave of empowerment that still has a hold on me. Although three months ago, the fourteenth annual Bioneers Conference provided me with inspiration and a feeling of hope amongst the political, social and environmental tumult that often plagues today's society.

The conference of "biological pioneers," which took place October 17-19 at the Marin Civic Center, was a thriving example that people, no matter how small or Herculean their efforts, can make change happen. Titled "Visionary and Practical Solutions for Restoring the Earth," the world's largest environmental conference drew 3,500 attendants, with another 1,000 people across the country watching via satellite. Thousands of ideas for the betterment of society and the environment, expressed in the form of posters, pamphlets and people unafraid to speak their minds, livened the air with tangible optimism.

Cybrena Everett, the Bioneers Green Event Coordinator, was proof that one person can make a difference. After seeing the ironically high amounts of waste at environmental conferences, she started an organization called Sustainable Life. Today Sustainable Life works with organizations such as Circle of Life, the Berkeley Ecology Center and the Marin Conservation Corps to "green" these festivals by setting up resource recovery stations and informing people about the growing need to recycle.

"Bioneers is a place where people can expand their own personal experience of being in the world," said Everett, who hoped to expand people's minds about recycling and sustainability at the conference.

Over 400 youth, the highest number ever, were able learn about these issues and others thanks to numerous scholarships and reduced fares. They partook in an orientation gathering, numerous workshops focusing on youth-specific activities, the youth space, and a dance Saturday evening.

"At Bioneers, [you are taught] what you can do as a single person," said Cory Lester, a seventeen year old who made a journey from Ashland, Oregon, to attend. "It's great seeing all the younger people here because I think we're the way of the future."

Walking around the exhibit hall, I could sense the incredible energy radiating from people of all ages, colors, backgrounds, and experiences. Young and old alike gathered to talk about the world, and seemed to share the same integral passion for life.

There was an eclectic array of workshops - Ecoliteracy, Mitigating Global Warming and Saving Wildlands, to name a few. All were packed with not only what is wrong with the planet, but also what can be done to alter the situation.

People had the opportunity to expand on their ideas with many new faces at the Conversation Cafes. According to host Claudia McNeil, they are “a space where people can talk to each other about what they’re learning about.” Each table came equipped with a set of pre-made questions to discuss about numerous topics ranging from war to urban gardening.

I left the conference pumped up to tackle the world, one step at a time, and thinking about a question written on a note card at the Conversation Cafe: “How do we get excited and integrate ourselves into working with the world?” Anybody who attended Bioneers would know that being there was part of the answer.

RESOURCES:

Interested in attending the Bioneers Conference next year? Go to www.bioneers.org