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Message from the Editor: A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Land Trust

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A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Land Trust

From the Editor

Nick Sanyal, PhD, Professor *Emeritus* of Natural Resources and Society, University of Idaho

After I announced my university retirement last year, I was courted by the local Land Trust to become a board member. After all, I'd been teaching natural resource conservation planning for over 30 years. "Give me a year of retirement," I responded. Well, it's been only eight months and I just signed on to the board. So much for keeping promises!

It wasn't the traditional role of land trusts, or conservancies—keeping private land private but protecting it from development while giving financial rewards and environmental benefits to the owners—that twisted my arm. Rather it was what the Palouse Land Trust wanted to use as a strategy for sustainability and growth that got my attention.

For a workshop to explore their future, organizers assembled a panel of local citizens, board and staff members, experts and regional and national advisors. And what emerged can only be described as a community engagement plan. The Land Trust sought to sustain its mission by expanding its image, widening the community's awareness of the Land Trust, and partnering with other local organizations in a symbiotic way—the local non-profit hospital, urban farmers and city schools, to name a few. Mental health and obesity can be managed by exercising in natural environments, and the Land Trust owns lands where groups of people could practice yoga, meditate, read, paint, and walk. Urban farms provide local foods that are fresh and healthy, and they too needed greater exposure and better protection in the region. And schools represent our future.

All of this is very new to an organization traditionally focused primarily on preserving natural resources and keeping working lands from becoming developed, but it speaks to the diversity of ways in which we can engage within our communities. The Land Trust is now dedicated to making regional communities more vibrant places in which to live and recognizes that by helping to sustain the communities it works in, it also sustains its own mission. A community organization can

only sustain itself if it has goals that are shared with the community in its many forms. An engaged community, particularly one in which disparate organizations and agencies build bridges between each other, is also a resilient community.

This is not hyperbole. My challenge to all of you as you read this issue of *JCES*, is this: Read beyond the narrow confines of your discipline or expertise, and see for yourself how the myriad connections that make up these engaged communities of ours can change your world.

Trina Van Schyndel's book review sets a perfect stage for this challenge by introducing us to the notion of a next generation of scholars.

In *Community Perspectives* Keisha Ivey and her colleagues remind us of the need for a shared and common language of engagement—free of jargon. A shared language facilitates trust and this trust is even more important as our engagement challenges become more interdisciplinary.

Jessica Taylor, James Canfield, and Kajsa Larson, working from the observation that because universities are often embedded within a local or regional community, reveal how problems facing the community often become campus issues. They worked with teams of students to examine the issue of food insecurity and in so doing were intimately exposed to how a community frames an issue and how it uses resources and knowledge to help solve it.

Thomas Barth writes about change when he reflects on his career working to close the divide between communities and universities, and within the academy. This gap is often the result of lack of real incentives for engagement work in the tenure and promotion systems for faculty. He goes on to chide members of the academy for failing to share the benefit of engagement work with fellow academicians often enough. He concludes, "Perhaps most importantly, an engaged professor is able to demonstrate to students and practitioners alike the value of a university working closely with their community."

Chinweike Eseonu and Jacob Hammar describe an Oregon State University program that is working to address the need for more culturally aware approaches to engineering design education and practice that can combat the culture of disengagement in engineering programs. They do this with a cross-disciplinary team of engineering, liberal arts, and Extension faculty working with teams of senior engineering students on nontraditional engineering design projects.

Elizabeth Gilbert and her team provided voice to marginalized communities (injection drug users) that enabled self-definition of problems, description of needs, and authentic engagement recommendations. Their work also helps define the nature and power of community, thus making intervention programs more effective.

Desre Kramer and her coauthors implemented a theory-informed community-change model that underscores the need for shared vision, evidence-based knowledge, a diffused but linked leadership, and rebuilding a sense of place and pride. They report on a community's efforts to remediate environment damage from severe industrial pollution and celebrate the long-term, evolving, emergent process that brought a myriad of partners and community interests together.

Laura Nabors and her team from the University of Cincinnati provide an illustration of next generation engagement with their social interaction approach to involve and assess high school students as health coaches for younger children.

Johanna Schuch not only engaged in a critical socially relevant issue of Hispanic immigrant youths' access to the labor market, but in the process, she also added to our knowledge of participatory action research.

Kaija Zusevics and her research partners studied the very 21st Century issue of genetic testing for inherited diseases among adopted people. Trust was found to be central to successful counseling and takes on three key dimensions: Trust in the intention of the research, trust that the adoption community will benefit from the results of research, and trust in the protection from misuse and abuse of genomic data.

To end I share a short quote from Desre Kramer, et al., "The restoration of the environment was a mutually reinforcing process: The greening of the city gave pride to its residents and attracted back those who had left and enticed newcomers to make Sudbury their home. In turn, this initiated even more community engagement activities, perpetuating a positive cycle."

The Palouse Land Trust is not alone.

(PUBLISHER'S NOTE: This is the final issue of *JCES* to be published under the editorial leadership of Dr. Nick Sanyal of the University of Idaho, as he passes his baton to Dr. Marybeth Lima of Louisiana State University. I know that the many readers and institutions who have benefited from his deft guidance of our journal for the past two years join me in thanking Dr. Sanyal for his exemplary leadership of and service to the field of engagement scholarship. — Dr. Samory T. Pruitt, The University of Alabama)