

Work of the Hand and the Heart

Thanks so much Pat, and thanks also to the City Club program committee for inviting me today.

I feel a really deep gratitude for this opportunity to speak about my love for the Fair and it's value to this community, my chosen home place of more than 30 years now.

May 9th may turn out to be an auspicious date for this talk. It was the birth date of Howard Carter back in 1874. Anyone remember Howard

Howard Carter was the English archaeologist and Egyptologist who discovered the tomb of Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings in Luxor.

Imagine that moment!

Thinking about that momentous discovery caused me to reflect on archaeologists 1000 years from now, puzzling over what appears to be a rather large glitter layer spread along the banks of the Long Tom River.

Wish I could be there!

Speaking of archaeology, some of the oldest known sites in our corner of North America exist on the Fair's 400 acres...this land has been a summer gathering place for at least 10,000 years, the place where the Kalapuya people came to harvest camas and prepare for winter. The meadow we call Chela Mela at the Fair comes from the Kalapuya word "chelamela," meaning "place by the river."

Some other things you might find interesting about the Fair

- Did you know we were a "featured attraction" at the Oregon State Fair for 2 years, in 2005 and 2006? Why, you might ask, were we willing to venture out of Veneta and risk being seen as hippie monkeys in this agricultural zoo?
 1. Well, it was great outreach into a very different demographic

2. It gave us a chance to showcase LiveArt! the name of our "attraction," to State fair-goers in a more participatory form than purchasing chotchkies from China or viewing beans in jars
 3. The State Fair also provided new employment, new audiences for a number of Fair artists and entertainers
 4. The Parades, hula hoping, stilt walking, and Fire dancing, introduced kids of all ages-to the celebration arts of the new Vaudeville
- The Fair is one of largest gatherings of new vaudeville in the world- 2 of our 4 vaudeville stages now feature aerial acts, ... and there's a Girls Circus - the next generation juggling the torch!
 - The Fair has 5,000-6,000 volunteers - and unfortunately has to turn hundreds away - many of whom have been with us for most of our 39 years. They include State Senators and representatives, several local judges, various law enforcement officials, city and county staff and elected officials, professor and pastors, and lots and lots of every kind of community leader, including many in this room.
 - We share our anniversary with the Bach Festival, KLCC, Saturday Market, White Bird
 - We've done 5 wetlands restoration and recovery grants in collaboration with the City of Veneta, LCOG, the DSL and the DEQ, Cascade Pacific RC&D, OWEB, and EPA Region 10, helping to establish a more environmentally friendly tertiary treatment for Veneta's effluent disposal system, at the same time we've restored and enhanced riparian habitat
 - We partnered with the City of Eugene's Youth Recreation Program at Peterson Barn to create Culture Jam, a weeklong arts based camp for a very diverse group of Teens. I could talk all day about Culture Jam, but let me just refer you to our web site for more information on what is truly a life-changing experience for everyone who participates.
 - We have a sizeable philanthropic program, giving away between \$40,000 and \$50,000 to local non-profits, artists, and educators, for projects as diverse as Food for Lane County's School Garden Project, White Bird's free Dental Clinic, art for the Fern Ridge Library, the ropes course at Camp Wilani, and for New Old Time Chautauqua to take their humor and humanitarian aid to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. Fair philanthropy will cross the \$350,000 mark this year.

- We literally build a small city along the banks of the Long Tom River. Every year, like some comical vessel, the village rises out of the flood plain and breathes itself back to life ... it's temporal ... elusive ... a world of magic and make believe that winds up feeling more real than real.

We'll celebrate our 40th anniversary next year, but before we get to that, I want to tell a bit of personal story to give you what I hope is some relevant context.

Like so many who came to Oregon in the late 60,s and early 70's, I was fleeing from a life that felt empty and shallow. I was despairing about what was being done in my name in places like Me Lai, and the killing fields of Cambodia. There was Watergate, and all it revealed about a government contemptuous of the democracy it was supposed to protect and defend.

There was an energy crisis brought on by an oil crisis, and my city - built around a river much like Portland - was responding with a plan to fill that river with floating nuclear power plants made by Westinghouse!

My husband had engineered one of the most efficient solar collectors in the country, we were in Florida, but no one was interested in energy from the sun. We knew we had to leave...

Friends and family truly thought we had lost our minds when we told them we were moving to Oregon to do solar energy. Indeed, it was the first time I was ever called a hippie.

But Oregon was a magnet for people hungry for a place and a community that was exploring, discovering, breaking new ground.

We landed in this extraordinary town called Eugene, built a solar energy business and connected with the solar energy center at the U of O, drank coffee at the Odyssey Coffee House, took classes at LCC in art therapy and organic gardening.

It was there that a fellow named Marshall Landman told me about this event in July called the Oregon Country Fair. We went the next summer, and fell completely in love with what we found. It is not hyperbole to say that those early years at the Fair, many as a ticket buyer and later as a volunteer, changed my life, profoundly and irrevocably.

So back to the future

In late 2004 at age 35, the Fair decided we were grown up enough to risk making a commitment to an intentional future. In true Fair spirit, we launched a Vision Quest, our version of strategic planning.

Our first task was to write some sort of declarative statement about who we are. We spent the first few weeks debating what not to call it - mission statement was ruled out immediately!

(Wish we had thought of "where minds come out to play" but you got there first.)

We never did decide what to name it, but here is the statement we came up with

"The Oregon Country Fair creates events and experiences that nourish the spirit, explore living artfully and authentically on earth, and transform culture in magical, joyous and healthy ways."

Three and a half years later, we've developed a truly wonderful set of goals, and ways to reach them, which we'll roll out at this summer's event. We want your feedback, your wisdom, your engagement; it's invaluable and essential to us, and we think will prove of enormous value to this community.

I want to spend the rest of my time today talking about why I believe that so completely.

For the last 6 years I've been teaching Event Management in the Arts and Administration Department at the U of O, and one thread that runs through the entire 11 weeks every year is a conversation about the social value of festivals and events like the Fair.

We dive into the story of Chautauqua, and its role in community cultural development; we talk about why festivals serve as touchstones in hundreds of small communities throughout this country.

We discuss the ways events serve as a new kind of Commons, where community identity is created and enhanced; where a shared sense of reality, and relationship to place are engendered.

We talk about all the ways events generate and bank social capital, the kind that helps us build social networks that create value, meaning, and the generalized reciprocity of pay it forward ... between people and groups that may never encounter each other elsewhere.

Did you know there is increasing evidence that one's happiness is best predicted by the breadth and depth of our social connections and experiences?

Communities endowed with a reserve of social capital are in a much stronger position to resolve conflict and realize opportunity. The contours of social capital affect the health of our democratic policies and processes.

in the open space of this new Commons, the rituals, rites of passage, iconography and social dramas of these expressive genres reveal how particular groups of people create meaning for themselves in the world.

It is the Fair's explicit intention to support, inspire and nurture people who care about making a difference in the world, in a wildly creative milieu of irreverent relevance.

But seriously, How people play is an incredibly revealing way of learning to understand both who they are and what they care about

And I think more importantly,- and there is solid research to back me up - there is simply no more effective way of breaking down social barriers than people having fun together.

Social memory involves the body - the more all our senses are engaged, the more powerful and compelling the memory.

For a few days in July, thousands of people live inside this "bubble magic" but the Fair is also a place where very useful and lucrative life skills are incubated and practiced.

Just think of all the businesses like Toby's Tofu and Ritta's Burritos and Rising Moon Ravioli and Dana's Cheesecake who got the boost they needed to become the thriving enterprises they are today.

Artists have opened retail stores, Security companies have formed, ... and then there's the Kesey's.

Cooperatives like Willamette People's Food co-op and Grower's Market and Genesis Juice flourished in Eugene in those early days, nourished by the Fair experience.

We are practicing what it means to be a good neighbor, not just for a few days a year, but year round. We've joined committees, and the watershed council, to listen and learn. The Elmira High cross country invitational is held on the Fair site every year now, we are part of local events like Wings and Wine, coming up this weekend. We've adopted the highway.

Experiments with becoming waste free, including large investments in durables and green power, are a training ground for master recyclers and energy auditors, and have provided us with some of the most costly, teeth grinding mistakes we've ever made, and oh people have we learned. And the list goes on and on and on, just like the fun

Every year people ask, "what's new at the Fair," and I always answer the same way...**everything**. My answer is neither facetious nor lazy. What is new at the Fair? ... Spontaneity ... Moments that take your breath away, feelings of belonging, of being at home in the world, a transcendental swim in the time stream, a delicious, sensual rush. Immediacy.

Immediate experience is, in many ways, the most vital touchstone of our culture. Terrence McKenna once said that real life exists in the boundary between either and or -

For the Fair, this is not an idea, it's a way of being. We seek to overcome barriers that stand between us and a recognition of our inner selves, of the reality of those around us, of participation in community, and immersion in the world.

We are a community of place, and in many ways we do what the river, and the trees, and the beaver demand of us. Nature, being nature, is dynamic and unfolding, and every year we reawaken to the dream of the earth.

No idea can substitute for this experience.

What keeps it so alive, year after year, since that cultural tsunami of 1969?

Last year was the 40th anniversary of the Summer of Love, and it seemed to spark some sort of extant cultural flashback ... The Hippies Were Right! the headline said. So what's all this new buzz about?

There were some clues in the media riffs paying homage to the SoL elders. Though they disagree on what really changed and what didn't, the Haight-Ashbury veterans mostly agree that ..American life has been profoundly impacted politically, culturally, and yes, even spiritually by what was born during that time. Those changes and the values that drove them have colored so many threads in the social fabric, that we're not even aware we're looking at the world through, well, tie-dye colored glasses.

Forty years ago thousands and thousands of young, and young at heart people - costumed, faces painted, in love with life - converged in a place and moment, and established the beachhead of a new culture meant to replace the old, repressive one.

Peter Coyote was one of the widely quoted Summer of Love veterans during the 40th anniversary media attention the event attracted.

Here's the gist of what he had to say

"We set out to imagine a better world, one that people might enjoy and consequently defend. We wanted to use our improvisational skills to create theatrical events that no one would know was theater...In retrospect, the Diggers were probably a four-year performance art piece designed to trigger a fundamental dialogue about power and money and class and status and who owned what in American society. We wanted to open the choices of how we could live our lives without being employees or consumers.

We didn't end capitalism, we didn't end imperialism, we didn't end racism. But if you look at the cultural agendas, they all worked."

It's been a long and winding road since those days, and the love and the hope and the beauty and the promise of those vital and vibrant times have become so buried and battered and twisted by those afraid of their power that our culture often treats the 60's as a tired, irrelevant anachronism.

In truth, we've done our share to help that perception along. In the 60's we spent a lot of time defining ourselves as "the other," as what we were not, how we didn't fit in, and not as much time articulating and creating the future we wanted. We became the counter-culture. Non-profits were counter-institutions, the back to the land self-reliance movement was in no small measure an act of disengagement.

The phrase "turn on, tune in, and drop out" was more than a mantra for the psychedelic experiment.

It became an anthem, a dogma, a mandate to reject the dominant culture. It may have helped us understand our individual uniqueness ...at the same time it helped us recognize our oneness with the universe, but it didn't do much for building community.

While we continue to study and learn from the social movements that transformed this country, our focus is less issue driven, and more coalesced around paradigmatic cultural shifts. We are learning to speak a new language, and no where is this more evident than around the language of sustainability. Grappling with the language is helping us understand the idea of sustainability differently, not as a movement or set of practices, but as an ethos. As Paul Hawkin so eloquently puts it:

"Sustainability is the language of kinship, of restoration, of possibility. Sustainability is not so much an environmental movement as it is a freedom paradigm."

For the Fair, becoming sustainable means no longer defining ourselves by what we are not, but by what we have to offer the world. It means sustaining engagement, and making the commitment to reach more intentionally for what we really care about....sustaining the courage to become more open, to actively seek out difference as the incredibly juicy, creative medium it is,to try new things and to failvery publicly sometimes I might add,... and really integrate those invaluable lessons.

And what does it really mean for this iconoclastic collection of cultural creatives ... this radical experiment in communitarianism to set out to transform culture, to nourish the spirit, to live artfully and authentically on earth?

To live authentically requires us to embrace change, to be willing to not know the answers, or as Meg Wheatley says, " requires a willingness to be disturbed, to have our beliefs and our models encounter disturbance"

To live artfully and authentically is to live as many of our artisans and entertainers do, in right livelihood, to do the work of the hand and the heart, in a way that one's art, one's avocation and the living of daily life are deeply integrated become a seamless whole.

Living artfully and authentically is embodied by our thousands of dedicated volunteers, who are proof that one's own uniqueness is at its fullest in the context of community, the Fair lives in the paradigm of abundance, thanks in large part to their sweat equity

Barbara Ehrenreich traces the history of collective joy in her latest book *Dancing in the Streets*, particularly around the carnival physicality of street fairs and festivals, created by and for participants.

Ehrenreich clearly elucidates how, throughout history, the deliberate practice of turning active participant into passive spectator, spontaneous celebration into orchestrated spectacle, emerges during times of cultural and political repression as a way of "disciplining and controlling unruly mobs," or those who would dare indulge in the moral lapse called pleasure.

But the people's challenge to the dispiriting dominant society has always been irrepressible. The English True Levellers became the dharma bums, then the Haight-Ashbury Diggers of the mid-60's, and now The Yes Men; Just as Commedia dell'Arte became the Merry Pranksters and the Bread and Puppet Theater and the Flying Karamozov Brothers.

And almost **40 years** later the **ancient ingredients** of **carnival** and **celebration** and **street dance** and **tribal stomp** ...have **aggregated** into the ..3 day **explosion** ...of **ecstatic communal whoop-de-do** called theOregon Country Fair.

And after all these years what it means to be hippie still comes down to some pretty basic ideas. It's about what we love ... and what it means to be a good human. It's about connectedness, to one another and to what we care about. It's about being open to new possibility, exploring difference as the undiscovered country about an animated, conscious spirituality. It's about a deep recognition that we are all in this together.

And it's about having lots and lots of fun.

"The 60's" and "hippies" have become catch all monikers for a multitude of complex phenomena, collapsed over the last 40 years into meaningless clichés and shallow stereotypes, when in fact this was a period of cultural awakening during which marginalized groups asserted their rights to social and economic justice, to have their divergent identities recognized, and to be full participants in the creation and mediation of culture. The "theater of the people" catalyzed a spontaneous participation in the community drama, and new cultural forms emerged and were amplified through art and celebration.

Hundreds of gatherings like the Fair were born of those times, yet few if any have survived, or they have morphed into something ubiquitous and unrecognizable as idiomatic 60's. The Fair stands in counterpoint, moving through time, transmitting and reawakening the norms, values and signifiers of the 60's, transforming culture..

The Fair tries in all it does to invite you onto the stage of a contemporary theater of the people, one that elucidates the relationship between oral history and cultural preservation, between public art and cultural memory.

Spoken Word, Community Village and Energy Park, Altared Space, local food, community murals, a riot of art, parades, giant puppets, more glorious food, the circus, laughter, all invite you to explore and celebrate the magic and awe of re-imagining culture and creating authentic community.

As Bill Wooten, one of our founders wrote all those years ago:

"Ours is a community of choice of reason rather than by chance of birth. Reason is found more each day on the side of cooperation, conservation and community.

Reason stands with those who reduce their wants and simplify their needs, who lessen demands upon the world's resources.

Reason stands with those who do not ask the world to do for them what they can do for themselves.

Reason stands with those who treat neighbors as friends, friends as sisters and brothers, and this earth as our one and only home.

Let us so stand together

It stands to reason, to endure (and I would add to engage), is to prevail."

Who is the Fair for? Everyone.

We want the Fair to be a place you can come as all of who you are, fueled as much by joy and delight as by tofu and transcendence.

Whether you are with us for a few hours or all 3 days, if you leave rejuvenated, and reconnected, a bit more hopeful and with a lot more WOW, and all of you very, very well-fed, then we will have done our job.

You'll take the world you discovered - the world you helped to create - with you into the now. The experience is timeless. The value, priceless

We don't pretend to have the answers. Our job is to open the space and walk with you into the questions:

Can we dream more?... Inspire the life of a child?....live together more gently? ... become warriors for wonder and a world of the imagination?

What we love, we want to live, and we should try to love everything

From Rumi:

"There's a community of the spirit here,**join it** And feel the delight of walking in the noisy street ...and **BEING** the NOISE.

Thank you so much for your time