



2021 NEWSLETTER

EARTH ALMANAC



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SHARING COMMON GROUND, CULTIVATING CONNECTION

TO CONTINUE CREATING CONNECTIONS

BY LAURA PETERSON, LEC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Friends of the Living Earth,

What a powerful season it has been. Collectively, this year we have gone through some sort of death or letting go process. We have mourned lives lost and/or drastically changed.

We were forced to redefine concepts such as teacher (parent), parent (zombie), saint (teacher and nurse), essential (who knew toilet paper?),

civility (mask), and have welcomed changes we didn't ask for, like Zoom meetings and pseudo-connection in a virtual space.

We have collectively had to process too much, constantly coming too fast and grapple with grayer shades of right and wrong, good and bad, growing and breaking, hurting and healing. We have reached for connection in the least likely ways and found resilience when stretched to the limits of our personal and communal capacities.

It has been uncomfortable. It has been frustrating. It has been isolating. It has been exhausting. And, I don't think I'm alone in saying things have seemed pretty dark at times.

I have found that in the chaos, there is a reason that people retreat to the Garden and natural spaces. All is fair in love and tomato growing. The sun still rises. The birds still sing. The rain still comes. Change is the only certainty, and the honeybee, green bean shoot, and fleeting summer seem to be ok with it.

Many turned to the Living Earth Center this year to find a place of solace, a sense of community that could be socially distanced, and also as a place of sustenance when finances were uncertain. We had a record number of people gardening, produce donations, and financial contributions in one of the most challenging times for non-profits in our lifetimes.

While yes, gardening became "cool" again in 2020, I believe one of the reasons Living Earth Center thrived is because it provides more than physical nourishment for our community. It also provides nourishment the soul both in crisis and upheaval and in times of peace.

This year has forced us to grow in new and different ways as an organization and adapt to changes that were both welcome and unwelcomed (at first.) But like any natural entity, we have found organic and creative ways to bloom. There are still many more exciting changes on the horizon.

I am proud that the Living Earth Center and all of its supporters, volunteers, and stakeholders continue to create both a physical and metaphorical space that not only flexes with natural and unnatural seasons but also remains rooted in bringing people together to share common ground, cultivating connection, and growing community.

We don't know how 2021 will compare to last year, but we know that we will continue to grow, flex and bend, and be a space where people can be nourished and grounded. Thank you for your continued support of our mission.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS UPDATE

- Meetings scheduled for the 2nd Monday of every other month.
- Next Board Meeting: May 17
- Board Retreat scheduled for April 9 - 10
- Welcome New Members: Ben Brzeski, Martin Jacaruso, Kelly Karstad, and S. Monica Wagner

STANDING COMMITTEES

Below is a list of all LEC Standing Committees which are open for non-Board Members to join. We are always looking for input from the greater LEC community. If you have interest in serving on a committee, please contact us at livingearthcenter@ssndcp.org for more information.

Advocacy
Communications
Development & Strategic Partnerships
Events Planning
Finance
Garden



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Laura Peterson

PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Amy Hunt

www.livingearthcentermn.org livingearthcenter@ssndcp.org

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ADVOCACY CALL: ENVIRONMENTAL AND RACIAL JUSTICE

BY MELISSA MARTENSEN AND BRIANA BAKER

In the past year the urgency to consider the intersection of environmental and racial justice has been brought into focus in the mainstream environmental movement.

After the murder of George Floyd and the push to recognize systemic racism in all aspects of our society those of us claiming to be environmentalists must look at the systemic racism present in our fight to save the planet and stop climate change.

In a May 2020 article for *The Correspondent*, Meteorologist and Climate

Journalist Eric Holthaus explains, "Climate change is racist because the system that caused it is racist. No, rainstorms don't care about skin colour, but worsening weather worldwide aggravates the divisions in society that already exist because it hits people of colour living in poverty the hardest. Simply put: the reason the world hasn't been fighting climate change as hard as it should is because powerful people don't want to stop exploiting people of colour. The urgency of climate change is also an urgency for racial justice."

Globally poor people are more likely to live on coasts and are therefore more likely to be forced to relocate due to rising sea level, droughts, and floods. We know that poor inner-city communities deal with more pollution than affluent suburbanites. History shows us that in Post-Reconstruction Era America (and beyond) laws were passed making it almost impossible for black farmers to own their own land.

Although white mainstream environmentalism has only recently started to acknowledge their work, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) have been actively combating environmental degradation for a long time. In a June 2020 *New Yorker* article, Environmentalist Bill McKibben said, "I find that lots of people are surprised to learn that, by overwhelming margins, the two groups of Americans who

care most about climate change are Latinx Americans and African-Americans. But, of course, those communities tend to be disproportionately exposed to the effects of global warming." These groups care more because they have to - their lives and health literally depend on it.

White environmentalists need to make sure we aren't taking credit, power, and history away from BIPOC communities by showing up to save them and "fix" a problem. We need to show up, listen, and learn how we

can be effective supporters of their initiatives, goals, and dreams. The following are just a few of the groups in Minnesota to be aware of.

Since 2012 the non-profit Dream of Wild Health has been working to reconnect urban Native Americans with the knowledge and access to healthy Indigenous foods, medicines, and lifeways. They have a 10-acre farm in Hugo, MN where they grow traditional foods from heirloom seeds given to them by a Potawatomi Elder.

Appetite for Change is a non-profit in Minneapolis working throughout the Northside with programs focused on urban agriculture, community meal boxes, the West Broadway Farmers' Market, and the Breaking Bread Cafe.

In Mankato, Feeding Our Community Partners, ECHO Food Shelf, and the Roots, Shoots, and Boots Coalition are just a few of the groups working to build a community dedicated to fighting food insecurity. Living

Earth Center is working with immigrant communities on plans to grow traditional foods not commonly found in Mankato groceries, on the Community Farm. The newly formed Mankato Chapter of the NAACP begins holding meetings in April.

Get involved in conversations surrounding environmental justice. Both Land Stewardship Project and MN350 have been hosting online workshops and conversations focused on the intersection of race and environmentalism.

On a national scale, MN Senator Tina Smith was part of a group of Senators who introduced the Justice for Black Farmers Act in February 2021. This legislation is aimed at addressing and correcting historic discrimination within the USDA. Look up the bill - learn about it and then contact your legislators and let them know it has your support.

On a personal level, the work of white people involves slowing down and asking how your privilege shapes how you view these issues. It takes humility and understanding that while you may not be overtly racist, you have been benefitting from racist systems. Then begin the work to change those systems to benefit not just the people who look like you.

Fighting for environmental justice is hard, fighting for racial justice is hard. Fighting both might feel overwhelming, but they have such shared impact and history that we cannot fully commit to one without also committing to the other.

LEC is dedicated to both environmental justice and racial justice. We are a place to learn and grow together as we strive to create a more just and equitable community. There is a lot of work to do- it will take us working together to get there.

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SAVE THE DATE

This spring we will be offering programming online via zoom. It is our hope that as the year progresses, the weather warms up, and more people are vaccinated that we will be able to return to in-person programming.

April 22 - Virtual Open Mic Night! Join us to celebrate Earth Day and kick off our 2nd Annual Give to Grow Mankato fundraising campaign with music, dance, poetry, and more!



A fun, tongue in cheek spin on our traditional sustainability classes! Held on the 3rd Monday of the month from 5:30 - 7pm.

- April 19** - Gardening 101
- May 17** - Foraging
- June 21** - Water Conservation
- July 19** - Medicinal Plants
- August 16** - Food Preservation
- September 20** - Seed Saving
- October 18** - Intro to Hunting



After postponing for a year due to the pandemic, we are excited to be holding our Common Ground Series!

Conversations will be held the 2nd Tuesday of the month from 5:30 - 7:30.

(Topics are subject to change as we finalize the program.)

- May 11** - Sacred Sites and Speechless Films
- June 8th** - Bike Polo and Bronze Casting
- July 13** - Murals and Mushrooms
- August 10** - Punk Rock and Pollinator Gardens
- September 14** - Hip Hop and Hairy Pigs



Join us **August 21** for a new twist on our Annual Community Picnic. Stay tuned for more details, but just imagine: performances by a variety of local musical artists, food trucks, mini farmer's market, and more!

Mark your calendars!
It's gonna be a party!

HELP US CREATE COMMON GROUND

Through outreach and educational programs, Living Earth Center touches the lives of hundreds of people in the greater Mankato area. Your donations help ensure these programs continue to be affordable and accessible to all, regardless of income level.

We work locally to educate about the Earth issues you care about. We reconnect people to the natural world and their desire to do better. We reach kids, elders, and everyone in between. We provide a perspective on Earth care, climate issues, and community resilience that is unique and much needed. We work at the grassroots level for systemic change.

We invite you to help sponsor our work by donating today! Chose your level, and know whatever the amount, large or small, you will be aiding Living Earth Center and making a difference in our community.

If you are interested in becoming a legacy sponsor, by putting Living Earth Center in your estate plan, please contact our Executive Director Laura Peterson at lpeterson@ssndcp.org.



Donations to Living Earth Center's general budget fund help support:

- Community Garden Scholarships
- Programming for Underserved Youth
- Compost/Wood chips for Garden
- Educational Supplies/Seeds for Sprouts Classes
- Special Tools for Dementia-Friendly Garden
- Instructor Fees for Classes/Workshops
- Meals and Entertainment for Community Gatherings and Solstice Celebrations
- Advocacy Supporting Regenerative Environmental Practices

HELP SUSTAIN SUSTAINABILITY!

Become a sustaining monthly donor: a convenient, budgeting-friendly way to make a lasting commitment to LEC's mission



DONATION PLEDGE CARD RETURN TODAY!

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:

LIVING EARTH CENTER
170 GOOD COUNSEL DR
MANKATO, MN 56001

DONATIONS MAY ALSO BE MADE ONLINE:

www.livingearthcetermn.org

YES! I WANT TO BE A
LIVING EARTH CENTER
SPONSOR!

\$1000 \$500 \$250

\$100 \$50 \$25

other \$ _____

Make this a monthly donation



Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Phone _____

TIME, TALENT, AND TREASURE: THANK YOU

Living Earth Center could not operate without the donation of time, talent, and treasure from such a vibrant and generous community of supporters.

We extend our sincerest thanks to each and every one of you.

Sustaining Donors

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Jolly & Chris Corley
Melissa & Brian Martensen
Laura Peterson
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Alice Zachmann
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Albino Alil
Mymique Baxter
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Sarah Dickhudt
Kathleen Felt
Bruno Gad
Jeanne Groebner
Victoria Heun
Renee King
John Love
Adam Massmann
Jennifer Prybylla
Darryl Schultz
Mary Walker

Earth Conference Task Force

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Dee Czech
Jeanne Groebner
Lalande Hennen
Amy Hunt
Melissa Martensen
Mary Tachney

DONOR SPOTLIGHT BARBARA YOUNG

I rediscovered Living Earth Center via the Summer 2020 Virtual Open Mic Nights. Not only did I enjoy each participant's creative offerings, I was very interested in what Laura had to say about LEC, its goals, and how it uses "education, advocacy, and collaboration" to achieve those goals to build community in the diverse world we live in now and to protect and nurture Mother Earth.



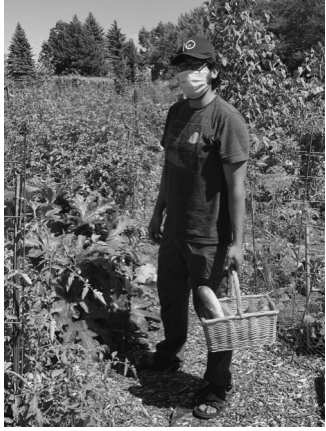
Prior to 2020 I had participated in a couple of workshops, a winter solstice, and even performed with a belly dance troupe at an LEC event. The Open Mic Nights really educated me on LEC's story and I felt like I would love to be a part of that vision.

I became a monthly donor because I believe in all that LEC is doing and offering to support our local community: helping people become self-sufficient as well as growing relationships with each other, providing workshops that are clearly designed to appeal to the many creative ways we can connect to Earth as well as nurturing our environment while also discovering the interconnection of our lives with each other and Earth.

There is much we can learn from each other and discover together in the safe and encouraging environment. I am glad to be a part of the LEC community by being a sustaining monthly donor.

GARDENER SPOTLIGHT

CHRISTIAN HUERTA



Hi, my name is Cristian Hortua and I am from Bogota, Colombia. I have lived in Mankato since 2015 as MNSU Mankato was the first school to accept me for their flying program.

Before coming here I didn't know anything about Mankato, the weather, or what is it like but I knew I wanted to see something new, get out of a big city like Bogota.

Through my college journey I had a couple of bumps along the road and had to adapt my plan accordingly. This adaptation usually started as something that did not seem ideal, but later showed me new things or gave me tools that I would need in my life.

That's how I found the garden in 2018-2019 - I started volunteering to help to remove the weeds and clean the paths.

After volunteering I realized that I would like to have my own little plot. Last year my girlfriend and I decided to take action and we started our very first garden; without much experience but with the help of the community we managed to cultivate and enjoy the fruits of our work in 2020.

My experience with the Living Earth Garden has been wonderful, I've encountered a lot of kind people; people that share the same interests, people that care and want to take action in a healthy and responsible way in order to share the joy of organic produce.

My favorite things to cultivate are jalapeños and flowers. I love spicy but I also really enjoyed having beautiful flowers at home from my own garden.

I really appreciate the garden and the community I found there. I gained more than just a space to cultivate. I found people that are similar to me, people caring for each other, and people that want to do the work and not just go for the quickest solution.

2020: A LOOK BACK



Our 15th Annual Earth Conference “Looking Back and Moving Forward” was an online retrospective of past conference themes and how they are still pertinent today. It was held last November and attended by over 60 people.



Local Artist Mal Murphy (right) donated her painting “Mother Nature” to LEC.

We asked ourselves, do we even *want* to look back at 2020!?

But jokes aside, while 2020 was a difficult and challenging year, we at Living Earth Center are lucky to be blessed by our amazing community and have much to be thankful for and enjoy looking back upon.

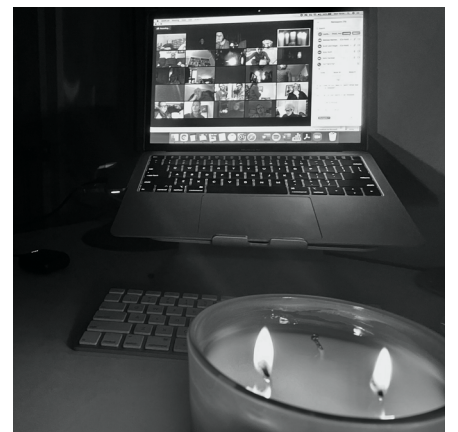
- Our first ever fundraising campaign, Give to Grow Mankato, was a resounding success - beating both our \$10,000 goal and our \$15,000 stretch goal!

- The Community Garden operated at full capacity with zero Covid Cases!

- We had our largest number of partner plots ever and donated over 1600 lbs of organic produce to our Community Partners.

- We were honored to be the beneficiary of *two* outside sponsored events, Chakra Jams in August and Chill on the Patio in September. Thank you again to the organizers and participants of both events

- Unable to meet in person, we hosted a summer series of Virtual Open Mic Nights, creating an online gathering space where singers, dancers, and poets from the Mankato-area and as far away as Brooklyn, NY performed on our virtual stage.



Winter Solstice was also held online with a virtual bonfire and people lighting candles where ever they were located.

An unforeseen silver lining of online programming - we were able to connect with people from across the country. Participants joined us from as far as Hawaii and Maryland to celebrate Solstice.

We are proud to have partnered with the following to bring interesting and educational programming to the LEC Community:

- Scott Kudelka, DNR Naturalist
- Megan Schnitker, ED of Mahkato Revitalization Project
- Laura Stastny, ED of Nebraska Wildlife Rehab

COMMUNITY CONNECTION: BEC COMMUNITY FARM

BY LAURA PETERSON, LEC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Living Earth Center is proud and honored to partner with Blue Earth County to take over the management of the Community Farm (newly located adjacent to Weagel Park, Red Jacket Trail, Mankato, MN 56001) effective this summer. This cross-pollination between the County and LEC is symbiotic since it will be an extension of what Living Earth Center already does well: cultivating food and connection.

By carrying out the original vision of the Farm in addressing food insecurity in the region, LEC will continue engaging community members, volunteers, and other community partners to come together to share common ground, develop sustainable solutions, and give back.

Our vision for the Farm is to invite partners and people from all areas of our local social system to come to the table to determine how this space should grow. We hope to eventually contribute approximately 3,000 lbs of produce to the local food economy, incorporate a free food forest with fruit-



bearing trees available to the public for harvesting, growing sections specifically for produce not traditionally found in local grocery stores or food banks that help promote cultural vitality of the diverse population represented in the region, expand Living Earth Center's educational space.

The project is in its seedling phase. The new space is uncultivated, which provides so many growth opportunities. We invite you to join us in sharing common ground and cultivating good things for our community.

The following are just a few ways to get

involved with the farm project:

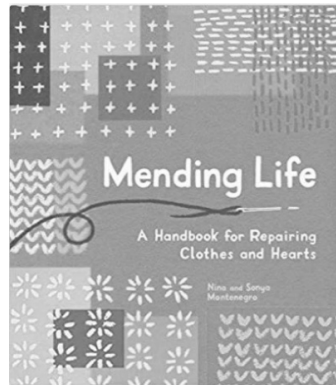
- 1) **Volunteer**- this will be an all hands on deck (er all hands in dirt) type of project that will require people from across all areas of the community to donate time to prepare garden beds, weed, water, harvest, and/ or deliver to our community partners. Does the place that you work for have a service day? Do your kids' sports teams need to do community service? We would love to be the place that you decided to spend time giving back.
- 2) **Give**- In addition to time, there are many resources needed to help a project like this thrive. Whether you have a financial or in-kind donation, it will go directly towards growing the space. No amount is too small.
- 3) **Have a say**- please join our Community Farm Advisory Committee designed to share ideas, suggestions, and expertise on what this community space can be.

If you have any questions, please reach out to Laura Peterson, lpeterson@ssndcp.org, for more information.

BOOK REVIEW: MENDING LIFE

BY MELISSA MARTENSEN

I don't know if there are enough exclamation points or heart-eyed emojis to adequately express how much I love *Mending Life: A Handbook for Repairing Clothes and Hearts* by Nina and Sonya Montenegro.



Aside from being a visual splendor and chockfull of detailed directions on how to tackle any mending need, it is above all else inspiring. As I perused this book for the first time I could feel myself getting more and more excited about all the possibilities that were *already* in my closet.

One doesn't have to go further than the book's introduction to see what I mean: "At first glance, mending may seem inconsequential, but not only does it mean buying fewer new clothes (thus slowing down the fast fashion cycle), it also invites us into a new way of being. Mending is a powerful act of restoration, both for our clothes and for our relationship to the world. We mend in gratitude, honoring all that went into making our clothes: the people who labored to bring them into being, and the plants and animals that

contributed to their creation. In taking care of that which takes care of us, we are demonstrating a deep understanding of our interconnectedness with every part of the world."

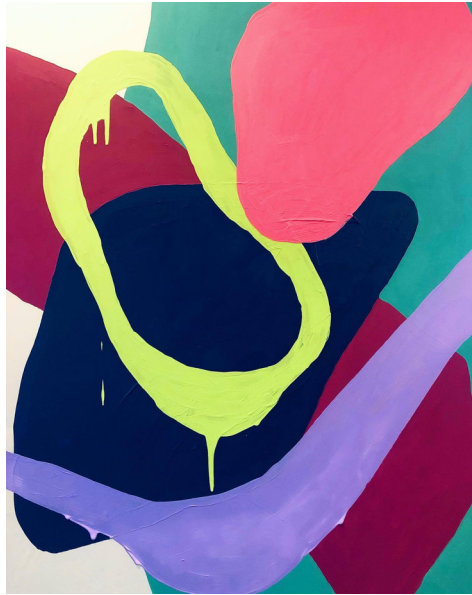
Mending Life covers a wide variety of patching and darning techniques. The "Getting Started" section includes everything from essential supplies and basic stitches to an introduction to Sashiko, the Japanese hand-sewing technique for reinforcement and decoration.

It is beautifully illustrated with step-by-step instructions so that anyone, regardless of experience or skill level (confession time: I struggle to sew in a straight line), can learn these skills and mend their clothes.

"*Mending Life* is an invitation to care for our belongings – and by extension, ourselves, our loved ones, and beyond."



LOCAL ARTIST SPOTLIGHT



North Mankato resident, Abby Deleki, is a multi-media artist. As a painter, they create murals, abstract acrylic paintings, watercolor and ink paintings, and most recently, mixed media collages.

They are a belly dancer and have an online studio where they teach heavy metal-influenced belly dance classes. Abby is a musician and has been playing drums for over 20 years. They have an MFA from the University of Delaware. All links to social media and their belly dance studio can be found at www.abbydaleki.com



REAL FOOD FOR REAL PEOPLE

Crustless Zucchini Tomato Quiche *from Simply in Season*



2 cups chopped zucchini
2 cups chopped tomato
1/2 cup chopped onion
1/3 cup grated Parmesan cheese
 Place in greased 10" pie pan

1 1/2 cups milk
3/4 cup baking mix*
1/2 t salt
1/4 t pepper
3 eggs

Beat in blender until smooth. Pour over vegetables. Bake in preheated oven at 400F for 30 min, or until knife inserted in center comes out clean.

I will include the baking mix recipe, but I'll be honest - I'm lazy and always just use regular flour and it comes out just fine.

Baking Mix
7 cups flour
3 cups whole wheat flour
6 T baking powder
1/4 cup sugar
1 1/2 T salt
1 1/2 t cream of tartar
2 cups shortening
2 cups dry milk powder

Combine dry ingredients (except milk powder) in large bowl. Cut in shortening with pastry cutter until consistency of cornmeal. Gently stir in milk powder. Store in airtight container.

