

# The Newport Plain Talk

Thursday, December 18, 2014 10:02 am

## Alternative Local Economy Summit held in Cocke County

Appalachian communities have a long history of being self-sufficient and using innovation to overcome obstacles. Over the mid-November weekend, international, state and local economic summits were held in Australia, Nashville and Cocke County Tennessee simultaneously.

Over nine regional and national non-profits such as CEDNET (Community Economic Development Network), SEAD task-force (Sustainable Equitable Agricultural Development), the Sierra Club, CWEET (Clean Water Expected in East Tennessee), SOCM (Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment), the Birdhouse (Knoxville), Clear Fork Institute (Claiborne County), Fair Trade Appalachia, Hands Off Appalachia and the Ant Farm (Morristown) gathered in Hartford to discuss how to build healthy and diverse economies across Tennessee.

The diverse group convened at the Bean Trees Cafe in Hartford and participated in a workshop led by Charles "Boomer" Winfrey, a media expert who has worked with many newspapers as a reporter, columnist and editor. The group toured local cottage industries and family businesses involved in eco-tourism, focusing on sustainable environmental practices and grass-roots economy.

First stop on the tour was Cosby's MoonMaids Botanical Sanctuary, where Cynthia Johnston preserves, protects and propagates endangered medicinal herbs for use in her line of products available at the Mustard Seed (Newport), Cosmic Ties (Cosby) and natural food-stores in Asheville. Cynthia has successfully been using wild yams and ginseng in her line of products for over 20 years.

The next stop in Cosby was Camp Grits which is owned by Primrose Coke and Jim Clark. It features an overnight teepee rental and a 50's era camper outfitted for "glamping", or glamorous camping. The group especially loved the outdoor bathhouse, which consists of a gravity-fed rain barrel shower over a wood-fired antique bathtub.

Next on the tour was Udder Chaos Homestead in Hartford where permaculture and organic gardening practices are used while highlighting how recycled building materials can be functional as well as artistic. Tiffanie & Eric's Jenkins' handmade cordwood home houses a pottery studio, the products of which Tiffanie sells at local festivals and farmers' markets. They believe in "wabi sabi", an oriental philosophy that believes that every functional thing can also be beautiful.

Standing Bear Farm, started by Maria Guzman and Curtis Owen, provided housing for the participants. Primarily a hikers' hostel, Standing Bear exemplifies how a viable business can be started using mostly recycled or free materials such as reclaimed wood, metal, rocks and even colored bottles as construction materials. It can also be used as a model for an emerging eco-tourism industry where guests are accommodated comfortably and affordably, replacing many modern facilities such as air-conditioning, electricity and washing machines with mountain breezes, candles and scrub-boards.

The local economic summit successfully gathered and enabled several organizations to talk about opportunities and challenges involved in reviving and expanding rural economies throughout Tennessee. The summit gave participants an opportunity to meet and learn directly from people working to build healthy and diverse local economies using socially and environmentally responsible practices. The SEAD task-force plans to convene a round table discussion at the Appalachian Studies Conference to be held March 27 thru 29 at ETSU.