

The Leaves of Twin Oaks

NEWS OF THE OAKS

by Valerie

With summertime at Twin Oaks come a variety of festivities and outdoor activities. We celebrated the community's 45th year of existence in June, with our annual **Anniversary** party. The weekend started off with a contra-dance, with music provided by our very own band "Contra-Ception" and a caller from Charlottesville. Throughout the weekend, we offered 4 different plant-based walks for people who enjoy this realm—there were tours of our Vegetable Garden, our Herb Garden, our Fruit and Nut Tree Orchards, and a Wild-Flower walk. Lunch on Saturday included a locally-raised whole roasted pig (several



Rick and Kyle hogging the pork

photo by Joan Mazza

people stayed up all night to make sure it safely roasted in the outdoor pit-oven we built) and dinner was a smorgasbord of Vietnamese delicacies. The afternoon activities included a coffeehouse, some musical story-telling, and our in-house Grateful Dead cover band.

We also had two **weddings** this spring. **Claire** and **Keith** were married in a ceremony in Kaweah yard, by Keith's grandfather who is a minister. They were married



Claire and Keith

inside a circle of quartz rocks, and at some point everyone present was invited to lay their hands on Claire and Keith for a group blessing. Two weeks later

Louisa-X and **Benji-X** had a more traditional ceremony in the community's central MT Flower Garden. That event doubled as a reunion of sorts,

since the couple had actually already left the community, and were welcomed back for the ceremony since they had planned to hold the wedding here before they left.

Members have been traveling to off-the-farm events as well. We had a van full of Oakers and Acorners head out to the **Rainbow Gathering** in early July to share the cosmic love vibes. And all summer long our members turn into vendors as we attend **Craft Fairs** up and down the East Coast, from New York to Georgia. We sell our hand-crafted hammocks and accompanying pillows and stands, as well as our patented Hanging Hammock Chairs. Our Fairs business is one way we market our hammocks and support ourselves. Click for a list of upcoming locations: www.twinoakstore.com/Craft-Fairs-sp-20.html

To a certain extent, organized group activities in the community tend to happen in the winter, but one group has been taking advantage of the good weather to meet outside. The **Primitive Skills Group** has been educating themselves, doing wild plant identification, making deadfall traps, learning the basics of tanning hides and bow drill fire making. Future plans include shelter building, skinning and cleaning animals, snare traps and fishing.



Louisa-X and Benji-X

And as follow-up from the Earthquake last summer, we had a geologist from the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy come out to do a slideshow about our local fault lines and ancient rock structures on our property. We also took a walk and explored a historic **gold mine shaft** on our land. It turns out that Twin Oaks is along a mile-wide series of bygone gold mines that run through central Virginia.



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Sharing with Style

“Naked Hippies Are Just a Stereotype”

by Brittany

Somewhere between a free clothing shop and a very large closet sits Community Clothes. Usually shortened to “Commie Clothes” or simply “Commie,” it is Twin Oaks’s answer to the problem of clothing our members. Almost anything textile-related can be found in Commie, from clothing and costumes to tablecloths and towels. Members shop around, select items that strike their fancy, keep (“privatize”) them for as long as they desire, and return them to the laundry in Harmony when they are finished. There, a laundry worker sorts and washes the incoming items, takes them upstairs to Commie, and hangs them up.

Clothes often first enter Commie circulation when a new member arrives with more clothes than they want; their cast-offs become donations. Friends, family, and ex-members also send us their used clothing. Some quick and sharp-eyed members will pick through a donation when it arrives, but everything is washed—no exceptions—before it goes upstairs to the racks. This goes for donations as well as for “clean” returns from member rooms. People travel from all corners of the globe to visit Twin Oaks, and this precaution protects us and our future guests from traveling parasites.



There is no obligation for members to participate in the system, and there is no dress code. While a few members rely almost entirely on Commie Clothes, avoiding the need to do their own laundry, most members maintain a stock of personal or privatized clothing in their rooms. In addition, a small yearly clothing allowance enables members to buy those clothing items that are

not as easily found in Commie, such as well-fitted shoes. We wash and maintain clothes that we like and would prefer to keep to ourselves. When they wear out beyond our desire to maintain them, when we tire of them, when the weather changes or we outgrow them, we return them to the cycle.

Although it is sometimes difficult to find what one is looking for on the first try, many members enjoy the experience of using Commie. Many members like to experiment, for free, with new ways of dressing, particularly at parties and on holidays. It is also a pleasure to see one’s old garments being worn and appreciated by others. The experience serves as an affirmation of one’s taste in clothing as well as positive reinforcement for our system of sharing, which is not only practical but also fun!



TWIN OAKS COMMUNITIES CONFERENCE

August 31-September 3, 2012

Sharing is the key to a better world: A weekend of community-building and culture creation!

This event offers workshops on various aspects of cooperative living including: sustainability, intentional relationships, group decision-making, resource-sharing and more. The conference is a wonderful networking and learning opportunity for those interested in communal lifestyles and other alternatives to "the system."

Plus it's just a lot of fun!

We welcome community seekers as well as experienced communitarians.

Labor Day Weekend, August 31 - September 3, 2012

For more information: www.CommunitiesConference.org

Spirituality at Twin Oaks

by Janel

Like many aspects of life at Twin Oaks, spirituality is left up to the individual. Besides believing in egalitarianism and non-violence, the choice to follow a particular spiritual path, or none at all, is made by each member personally.

This works well for fundamentalist-Christian-turned-atheist Alex. Alex was overjoyed to find an income-sharing community with non-theist self-governance. “Our decision-making processes respect the needs of religious people but aren’t based on religious ideals,” Alex explains. “I love that I can discuss religion with anyone here and not feel pressured or attacked. This is the most secular environment I’ve ever been in!”

Yet the community’s lack of religious identity poses a challenge for those striving to maintain connections to various faiths. Nina—raised an observant Jew—doesn’t keep kosher at Twin Oaks, for instance. “Not a single plate or pan would be considered kosher,” she notes. But for Nina, Jewish doctrine is second to the religion’s rich cultural heritage. Nina is a fifth-generation Klezmer musician, so feels **most** connected to her faith through music. Luckily for her, she happened to stumble upon a commune with an active Klezmer band, The Vulgar Bulgars. Now one year later, she’s yodelin’ Yiddish as our band’s lead singer.

Shal has noticed over the past 30 years that the events celebrating his religion, paganism—probably the best represented spiritual practice at Twin Oaks—ebb and flow depending on who’s around. “I appreciate Mayday and Samhain, the holidays we regularly celebrate here. Who will make them happen?” he ponders. “It’s very ‘Twin Oaks.’ It’s all about individual motivation and energy leading the larger group and culture.” And Shal finds that living in a rural setting reinforces his pagan ideals. “Paganism is all about reverence for the natural world,” he says. “I get to sidle up to big trees, see their beauty and feel their energy. I get to see the moon rise and bask in the glory of the world lit up in a way that isn’t quite day and isn’t quite night.”

Marione, one of our community elders, has been a Quaker for twenty-one years. Marione pays out-of-pocket to drive to Quaker meetings in Charlottesville once a month. Add the social distractions that come with life in a large community, Marione says, and it can be difficult to “stay on path.” She’s considered moving to a Quaker retirement home in Maryland, as ex-member Ione did. However, because the retirees there live in individual one-bedroom apartments, Marione thinks that one of the major ideals of Quakerism—sharing—might actually be better manifested at Twin Oaks. In the end, Marione concedes, it’s up to her to take advantage of the aspects of life at Twin Oaks that enable her to deepen her relationship with Quakerism.

The same is true for every Oaker aiming to live their life according to the ideals of a particular spiritual path or value system. Although having an array of ideologies in one community might seem fragmenting, for us, we are happy to be home to people from a rich variety of traditions, and this is one way we keep the communal fabric lively and diverse.



Alex and Claire with mixed messages