



La Vista Visions

A NEWSLETTER ON THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

Published by the Oblate Ecological Initiative

618.466.5004

4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL 62035

info@lavistaelc.org

Summer/Fall 2016
Volume 15, Issue 45

Opening the Door of Mercy in Your Back Yard

by Jack Lau, OMI and Maxine Pohlman, SSND

Pretend that the door pictured here is in your own back yard instead of at La Vista. Do you see anything beyond it in need of your merciful care? If your answer is "yes", we invite you to be present, listen to the needs, and respond. If your answer is "no" or "not yet", please read on.

Native by Design

In January we attended *Native by Design: Landscapes Beyond Beauty*, a conference focusing on the value of native plants in our landscapes. Doug Tallamy, author of *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants*, was the main presenter. Both of us already had a deep appreciation of gardening, but this speaker compellingly engaged us with his account of the fascinating ecological interactions between plants and wildlife. He emphasized the importance of native plants in gardens that imitate the disappearing wild world. He explained why exotic plants can hinder and even confuse native wildlife, including birds, bees, and even larger fauna.

At the end of the day, both of us felt we had experienced something sacred in the room with 300 others who also felt committed to planting natives in gardens and landscapes. There was a sense that each of us has a responsibility to extend a merciful hand to the wild creatures we enjoy and want to have in our lives now and into the future.

Tallamy helped us to be heartened by hope as we learned that it is not yet too late to save most of the plants and animals that sustain the ecosystems on which we depend. Best of all, we left feeling confident that restoring native plants to our human-dominated landscapes is relatively easy to do right in our own back yards.

Action in Our Own Back Yard

Fortified with so much convincing information, we returned to La Vista to evaluate trees and plants. In April, when the trees began to blossom, Jack noticed a Bradford Pear along the driveway. Not one to waste time and effort, he cut it down! What's so bad about this tree? Tallamy calls it an "alien orna-

mental". Native to China, it was brought here to help develop resistance to fire blight in the common pear. Looking beautiful and blooming early, it became the second most popular tree in America by the 1980s!

It has now become an ecological threat, able to cross pollinate and produce seeds that are spread by wildlife, overrunning open areas and competing with native trees in fields and hedgerows. Bradford pears can crowd out prairie grasses and flowers, affecting the habitat of certain small mammals and songbirds.

A Call to All Gardeners

Tallamy encouraged us to make it a goal to rid our yards of alien plants and replace them with natives - species that have evolved within our area over many millions of years. Why? If you closely examine the plants in your yard, you will notice that most aliens (or exotics) promoted by nurseries grow peacefully with very little or no leaf damage from insects, while native trees obviously supply many insects with food. If native insects cannot or will not use alien plants for food, then insect populations will dwindle unless provided the species with which they evolved. Because so many animals depend on insect protein for food, *a land without insects will end up being without higher forms of life.*

Both of us were taken with the new role that has been offered to gardeners everywhere:

help manage our nation's wildlife. Tallamy calls on gardeners to make a difference "to the future of biodiversity, to the native plants and animals of North America and the ecosystems that sustain them."

Choosing Natives

The tree that made the biggest impression on us was the mighty oak which is considered to be a food hub and has been named our national tree. Tallamy emphasized that the value of oaks for supporting wildlife cannot be overstated. "Acorns fill the bellies of deer, raccoons, turkeys, mice, black bear, squirrels, and even wood ducks. Cavities that develop

(Continued on page 6)



Letter from the Editor

Dear Friends,

May the blessings of the season of summer be yours – a safe, renewing time!

This issue of La Vista Visions takes its theme from the Holy Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis on December 8, 2015. The final event on that day was the artistic projection of pictures of indigenous people, and threatened and endangered species and ecosystems onto the façade of the Vatican in Rome. Through this creative event Francis asked us to wake up and extend mercy to the whole Earth community, to our planet in peril.

In the article on page one Jack Lau and I invite you to make Francis' call concrete by offering mercy in your own back yard. Planting native species is a way in which each of us can "make a difference" in our local areas. I am grateful to Jack for so wholeheartedly embracing this effort at La Vista.

Another invitation to extend mercy comes from Caitlin Zera in her article on page 3. She is currently filming a documentary about food deserts, those areas in our cities where residents lack access to grocery stores. Reading her article opens our eyes to this complex issue and calls us to offer compassionate awareness to those suffering this injustice.

Learning about Oblate Father Paul Wightman's lifelong passion for caves woke me up to the riches lying below ground and the necessity of preserving the health of subterranean ecosystems, another place to extend a hand of mercy. In the past when I used the phrase "caring for the whole Earth community" I mostly thought

about above ground members. Now I am more aware of the hidden world in our bioregions.

Join us as we honor Father Paul during the Summer Solstice celebration on June 17th.



Sister Maxine and Paul Wightman, OMI

You can read about the special event in our Calendar of Events on page 4.

Thank you for all the ways you act as a merciful member our rare and precious planet!

For La Vista,
Maxine Pohlman, SSND

Creating a Mutually Enhancing Human Earth Relationship

Commemorating the First Anniversary of the Encyclical Laudato Si' - June 18th

OUR LAUDATO SI' DECLARATION

We joyfully declare that we have read the Papal Encyclical, Laudato Si, as a community and both collectively and individually we pledge our hearts and minds to the enactment of this encyclical.

We have joined together to read this encyclical and discuss its importance for our local communities and the world, and we wish to share with others the joy, hope and integrity that it offers. Diverse international perspectives informed our work and will enable us to take the encyclical's message far and wide.

We commit ourselves to sharing these ideas with people we meet and to engage others in prayer, action and advocacy for the environment and all of God's creation. We do this in order to make our common home a better place to live for future generations, as well as to decrease the impact of selfish overuse of environmental resources that has and continues to destroy our natural world and cause many people to suffer, especially the poor, the under-served and at-risk communities.

With urgency, we pledge to confront our broken consumption-based economy and look to new ways of building community that will benefit all peoples. We commit ourselves wholeheartedly in a spirit of peace, justice and integrity for all creation.

Signed: Sr. Maxine Pohlman, SSND (Oblate Ecological Initiative, Godfrey IL, USA) Betsy Slosar (Center for Spirituality & Sustainability, Edwardsville IL, USA) Virginia Woulfe-Beile (The Sierra Club, Alton IL) Rev. Bill Veith (ELCA Lutheran Pastor, Alton IL, USA) Richard Worthen (Alton IL, USA) Fr. Jack Lau (Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Godfrey IL, USA) Fr. Tom Horan (Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Godfrey IL, USA) Fr. Rudy Nowakowski (Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Godfrey IL, USA) OMI Novices: Amila Perera (Gampaha, Sri Lanka) Nishan Priyadarshana (Buttala, Sri Lanka) Jean-Emmanuel Meloncourt (Port-au-Prince, Haiti) Paul Raj Arulanantham (Dindigul, Tamil Nadu, India) Joshua Nash (Adelaide, Australia) Steven Montez (Kingsville TX, USA)

Healthy Food Inequities: The Factors of Urban Food Deserts

By Caitlin Zera

The definition of a “food desert” may seem straightforwardly geographic: the United States Department of Agriculture defines an urban food desert as an area in which residents do not have “access to a full-service grocery store within one mile.” But this geographic parameter is only the starting point for understanding a disparity that articulates the summation of economic and social realities many communities now face.

The concept of food deserts folds in many different issues including health, transportation, food insecurity, poverty, culture and community development. Not having access to a full-service grocery store within a mile means limited access to fresh, healthy, and affordable food.

Access can mean a number of things. In a city that lacks a well-connected public transportation system, if you don’t own a vehicle, traveling over a mile by bus carrying your groceries can be difficult. Access also encompasses economic and experiential aspects - what foods you can afford, what you are familiar with, how much time you have, and what tools you own to prepare fresh food.

In the absence of a grocery store, many food deserts are populated with convenience stores which carry mainly processed foods, and occasionally a few staples like milk and bread. Lack of *fresh* produce impacts *health* as the available alternatives are often pre-packaged and nutritionally deficient.

What we can *afford* to eat economically is not often compatible with what we can afford to eat for our long-term health. Though fresh, healthy foods, especially purchased in bulk, can be less expensive in the long run and keep us from paying in health care costs later, those foods aren’t always affordable in the short term.

In a food desert, the many social, cultural, geographic and economic barriers to accessing fresh food shape the way communities eat and live.

The city of St. Louis attributes the emergence of the region’s food deserts to “closures and relocations of existing grocery stores that occurred since the late 1990s.” The changing economic landscape of past decades has seen a marked shift from small independent stores to larger chains owned by increasingly conglomerated corporations.

There are also connections between the divestment in social programs, suburban sprawl, and the industrialization of agriculture to the creation of food deserts. While we can identify patterns and contributing factors, the narrative of each community is unique.

Building chain grocery stores in food deserts certainly can improve immediate access to fresh produce but will an increase in these stores sustainably solve issues of access and food insecurity for communities?

Community development and economic empowerment are real solutions. These efforts are not without challenges, and it can take a long time to restore resources to a community. A vibrant example is the Grassroots Grocery in Alton, IL. It’s a grocery store co-op that discounts memberships for low-income customers and accepts SNAP benefits. It looks to fill gaps in access to fresh food via cooperative economics so the store’s products and profits stay within the local community.



The history of food deserts is complex, but sustainable solutions that address economic and social inequalities do exist. And it’s this story of solutions that will be written by our communities and local farmers, not corporations or Big Ag.

Caitlin Zera is a filmmaker and environmentalist. She is the Development Coordinator at Missouri Coalition for the Environment and is currently filming the documentary, *Crossing the Desert*, a film about food deserts in St. Louis communities. Visit www.crossingthedesertfilm.wordpress.com

Program Calendar June - December, 2016

Summer Solstice:

Honoring an Oblate "Caveman", Paul Wightman, OMI

***Friday, June 17 7:00 – 9:00 pm**

(*Note the day and time-not our usual Saturday afternoon timing.)

Some ancient caves around the world are aligned with the Summer Solstice sunrise, providing a gathering point for celebrating this celestial event. La Vista's version of this phenomenon is to celebrate the beginning of summer by honoring Paul Wightman, OMI, a long-time spelunker who is recognized as the earliest surveyor and explorer of the Fogelpole Cave System in Monroe County, Illinois. Recently, the land around the cave has been purchased for preservation, and in honor of Father Paul's work has been named the *Paul Wightman Subterranean Nature Preserve*.

Father Paul's presentation will be an opportunity to expand appreciation of our planet to include the underground realm in our local bioregion. We'll learn about caves in Southern Illinois and Missouri and the large and diverse animal population they support.

The presentation will be followed by a reception. Suggested donation: \$10.

Registration is requested and can be done by calling 618-466-5004 or by e-mailing info@lavistaelc.org



Authentic Indian Food Cooking Series Saturday, June 25 and Saturday, October 1 10:30 am – 12:30 pm

Bring your appetite and enthusiasm for a fun-filled culinary experience. The class includes an introduction to Indian ingredients, a hands-on workshop on preparing delicious Indian food, and the enjoyment of eating the prepared dishes.

Menus:

June 25: Indian curry, aromatic rice, and Indian flatbread
October 1: Menu to be announced.

Both classes will be led by our friend and experienced Indian cook **Anu Trzaska**.

Cost: \$15 per class.



Registration: Send your payment to La Vista Ecological Learning Center, 4300 Levis Lane, Godfrey, IL, 62035.

Deadline for the first class is June 22; for the second, Sept. 28.

Please indicate which class you are attending and include your e-mail address; confirmation will be sent via e-mail.

Autumn Equinox Celebration: Night Visions Nature Photography Presentation by Dan Zarlenga Saturday, September 24 7:00 – 9:00 pm

Dan Zarlenga is the Missouri Department of Conservation's Media Specialist for the St. Louis Region and has been an amateur astronomy enthusiast most of his life. When he took up an interest in photography 6 years ago it seemed only natural to turn his camera to the stars. He especially enjoys the challenge of blending both elements of the night sky and land in his photos. Dan's photographs are a collection of twilight scenes, starscapes, star trails and moonlit landscapes, all revealed by the magic of long exposures.

Join Dan as he presents a collection of his images and reveals some of the techniques he uses to create them. In addition, Dan will include photographs he has made from the last several years of the Equinox sunrise at Woodhenge at Cahokia Mounds State Historic Site.

Suggested donation: \$10 per person.

Registration is requested and can be done by calling 618-466-5004 or by e-mailing info@lavistaelc.org



Opportunity to Change How You Receive *La Vista Visions*

To change the way you receive your newsletter, to add a name to our maillist, or to change your e-mail address, please let us know: info@lavistaelc.org or 618-466-5004.

Enclosed is my donation to support the newsletter and the programming at La Vista.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address: _____

Street

City

State

Zip Code

Email Address: _____

La Vista Ecological Learning Center 4300 Levis Lane Godfrey, IL 62035



Autumn Weekend ***Exploring the Sacred Universe*** **Earth Literacy Program** **6:00 pm Fri., Oct. 19 – 1:00 pm Sun., Oct. 23**

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home* has brought new life to this classic program as readers look for ways to deepen their relationship with and responsibility for our common home. That is what we offer during these days of interactive community learning.

For the second year we are offering a shortened version of our "Exploring the Sacred Universe" Earth Literacy Program. Participants will be joined by the Oblate Novices, the young men from several countries currently studying at La Vista. Last year's very rich experience during beautiful fall days encouraged us to make this an annual event.

For a detailed description and registration information visit us online at www.lavistaelc.org and find our brochure under "Upcoming Programs", or call us at 618-466-5004 for a conversation about the program.

Cost: \$350 includes lodging, meals, and a \$50 nonrefundable deposit to be sent with registration.



Exploring the Green Burial Option **Mon., Sept. 19, 7:00—9:00 pm**

Green burial is a way to embrace death as a natural part of the life cycle. It involves family and friends in the process, is environmentally friendly, and energy efficient. Join us and learn about this important option from a green cemetery staff person and an informative and engaging movie. There will be a question and answer period included.

Suggested donation: \$5.00

Registration: Call 618-466-5004 or e-mail info@lavistaelc.org

Volunteer Workdays **in the Oblate Woods Nature Preserve** **Second Tues. monthly, 9:30 am –12:30 pm**

La Vista is hosting monthly volunteer workdays in the 16 acre Oblate Woods Preserve. We will be pulling up emerging honeysuckle throughout the growing season. This is an opportunity to contribute to the healing of a small part of our planet, to enjoy camaraderie with others who share your interest, and to do it in a very beautiful place! Thanks for considering becoming a volunteer.

Hours: Workdays begin at 9:30 and end at 12:30 with a simple lunch we will provide.

Tools: We provide gloves and a few loppers and grub hoes. If you have this equipment you might want to bring your own.

Registration is requested. Call 618-466-5004 or e-mail: info@lavistaelc.org.

The Oblate Ecological Initiative is a ministry of the
Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate.



La Vista Ecological Learning Center
4300 Levis Lane
Godfrey, Illinois 62035

*"As gardeners
and stewards
of our land,
we have never
been so
empowered—
and the
ecological
stakes have
never been so
high."*

- Doug Tallamy

(Continued from page 1)

in living and dead oak giants supply vital nesting sites for dozens of species of birds." He went on to call oaks "the quintessential wildlife plants: no other plant genus supports more species of Lepidodptera, thus providing more types of bird food than the mighty oak." (p.148 Bringing Nature Home)

We were amazed to learn that parent birds need from 6,000 – 9,000 caterpillars to feed their young before they leave the nest! They need merciful gardeners – ones who see a need and provide help. In his book Tallamy offers a list of native plants and the numbers of butterfly/moth species they support.

Here is a sampling that could convince anyone to go native:

TREES

oaks support 534 butterfly/moth species;
black cherry - 456; birch – 413; crabapple – 311; pine – 203; hickory – 200; walnut – 130

PLANTS

goldenrod – 115; asters – 112; sunflower – 73;
Joe Pye – 42; morning glory – 39; black-eyed Susan – 17;
milkweed – 12!

For a complete list: <http://www.bringingnaturehome.net/what-to-plant.html>

Convinced? We invite you to join so many other gardeners who are seeing beauty in a new way - not in the showiest, insect free species; rather, in those natives that provide what animals need to survive. Join us and open the door of mercy to the whole Earth community!



Max and Jack invite you to join us for our work days to remove invasive species, weed the pollinator garden and hike the Preserve. See the calendar of events for more information. Follow our E-News for updates on these events. Happy gardening!
