

Opinion

Kenneth A. Svanum, President and Publisher

Matthew F. Wilson, Executive Editor

Brad Breithaupt, Editorial Page Editor

MARIN VOICE

It's time to celebrate Earth Day

IT HAS BECOME clear to me over the past months that many highly educated people making decisions for the health of our communities have little understanding of basic ecological principles.

One only need look to a disaster on the scale of Hurricane Katrina to see the ways in which ecological misunderstandings have led to severe social, environmental, economic and political repercussions.

Unfortunately, the reality of this situation was also realized in Marin County this past New Year's Eve, as many communities that have built on floodplains, riparian systems and in flood-prone locations suffered severe damages from inundation.

These events lead me to reconsider just how "natural" these so-called "natural disasters" really are. In many instances, it seems as though they are natural events magnified by ecological illiteracy.

David Orr, noted professor and chair of the environmental studies department at Oberlin College, puts it best when he writes that "all education is environmental education."

"To teach economics without reference to the laws of thermodynamics or those of ecology," Orr states, "is to teach a fundamentally important ecological lesson: that physics and ecology have nothing to do with the economy. That just happens to be dead wrong."

Indeed, an understanding of not only ecological principles but also of the ways in which those principles overlap with and inform historically segregated academic disciplines is vital to any profession, particularly those involving community-level decisions.

JIMMY PURVIS



Jimmy Purvis of San Anselmo is a crew leader at the Marin Conservation Corps. This is part of a five-day series leading up to Saturday's Earth Day celebration.

At the Marin Conservation Corps, a job training and resource conservation organization, we take Orr's words very seriously. Environmental literacy is the central component of all education at MCC, and a majority of education and training takes place outside in the field through field education, site visits, partnerships with national and local parks, and natural resource and conservation field work.

In all instances, the environment is used as the context in which to learn about a wide array of topics, ranging from natural resource and recycling education to traditional academic disciplines such as language arts, social sciences and health.

MCC programs vary widely and attract an equally varied population. Programs include a Natural Resource Crew, which works throughout Marin on a variety of environmental projects, a Community Recycling Crew, which picks up recycling from local parks and non-profits, and a Recycling and Environmental Americorps Program, which includes ecological management and environmental education programs.

Many corps members are enrolled in the John Muir charter school and study to receive their high school diploma, GED or English-language training.

Most other corps members participate in Americorps and earn training hours toward an education award, gaining valuable job experience, education and training while serving their community.

While the work that corps members perform differs considerably, ecological literacy binds their education and training together.

This pedagogical approach, which seeks to connect rather than separate disciplines, is a testament to the fact that "all education is environmental education."

The corps's ongoing work promotes eco literacy and environmental stewardship. We also organize special events that bring together the county to celebrate and protect the Earth.

On Saturday, the corps is joining with Next Generation, Safe Routes to Schools and the State Parks to organize an Earth Day festival at Samuel P. Taylor Park. The day will begin at 9 a.m. with a service project in the park, and from noon to 3 p.m. there will be celebration featuring live music, speakers, a children's area, and a dozen of Marin County's leading environmental education organizations and green businesses.

The festival will be a great way to serve the county, learn about the environment and enjoy a day of celebration as well.

For more information, visit www.marinearthday.org.