

## Support Your Local Arts Center

By Fred Balzac

THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT by the Appleby Foundation, a not-for-profit extension of Rebecca Kelly Ballet, of a plan to convert the Masonic Lodge in Au Sable Forks, NY, into a multi-use building for cultural activity raises the prospect that the Town of Jay, where I live, will eventually be the home of not one, but three arts centers.

Some onlookers, noting that the town has fewer year-round residents than the seating capacity of some New York City theaters, may find this to be too much of a good thing—especially given the state of the economy. As a full-time writer, sometime community organizer, and constant believer in the transformative power of Art, I think the advent of very localized arts centers across our region offers the potential of not only a cultural renaissance for the North County, but of an economic rebirth as well.

For that to happen, however, much will be required of local arts organizations, government, and—above all—the people of the North Country.

It's quite possible that the poor economy will winnow out some of the less-organized arts groups; but for area organizations to thrive as well as survive, they really need to develop a spirit of collaboration. From my experience as a participant, a board member, and an arts reporter, I've found that communication is poor among groups and there is too much overlap in scheduling and selection of material. Arts groups should regularly confer with one other, coordinate their seasons together, and consider collaborating on productions/events.

Groups should also seek to develop their own individual niche or specialties. In an interview with the *LCW*, Rebecca Kelly envisioned how the planned Tahawus Lodge Center in Au Sable Forks might serve as a rehearsal space for other venues, including the Amos and Julia Ward Theatre in Jay hamlet. The arts locus of Tahawus may be as a dance studio and an art gallery. The Upper Jay Art Center also has an art gallery; but its singular niche seems to be as a home for cutting-edge plays and hot bands. The Ward Theatre, meanwhile, hosts a coffee-house music series, children's dance and theater programs, and a variety of workshops.

If the three centers can find a way to work together, they each might make it by serving their own immediate community and developing a diversity of programming to attract a wider audience beyond the confines of their neighborhood.

That's where government and the People come in. Government officials at all levels need to recognize and foster the economic potential of local arts centers for generating revenues and even jobs. And residents should support their local artists not only out of a sense of cultural generosity, but also financial self-interest.

We as a people may not be able to control where oil comes from or our manufacturing jobs relocate to; but we can spend some of our disposable income on locally produced goods and services, including art. You cannot outsource live theater or music performances to China or India.

We need a "Buy Local" campaign—implemented by government and supported by the People—that encompasses locally produced art as well as locally grown produce.

Our region is blessed with an abundance of beauty and creativity. We must remember that, of those to whom much has been given, much is required.

*Fred Balzac is a regular contributor to the Lake Champlain Weekly. On July 13, 2009, he filed papers to run for Town Councilperson in the Town of Jay.*

Food *for* THOUGHT

With Robert Pelletier

## CLOSING THE LOOP

GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY DEPENDS on cheap supplies of man-made fertilizers to sustain high yields. So, the tripling of fertilizer prices over last year has caused concern to corn farmers across the globe. Much of this inflation is fueled by increasing prices of fossil fuels that are required to convert atmospheric nitrogen into forms that plants can use to build proteins. However, another easily overlooked cause is the increasingly tight supply of another essential plant nutrient, phosphorus.

Plants need phosphorus for energy metabolism, cell membrane integrity and DNA synthesis. While additional nitrogen fertilizer can always be synthesized from atmospheric nitrogen (albeit, at increasing cost), phosphorus is derived principally from rock phosphate. As the depletion of this limited resource by a growing global population accelerates, the specter of "peak phosphorus" looms. This is the point at which demand will outstrip the rate of extraction, fueling food inflation, shortages and geopolitical turmoil.

Man's dependence on chemical fertilizers grew out of the concern in Europe in the early 1800s that the diminishing yields from soils worn out by centuries of continuous cropping would throttle the Industrial Revolution and fuel social unrest. The German Justus von Liebig, the father of modern soil science, elaborated the principles of plant nutrition, identifying phosphorus as one of the "essential elements." The principal source of phosphorus at that time was bird and bat guano (droppings) and Liebig's findings unleashed a frenzy of "guano imperialism" as European nations scoured the globe for guano deposits. The Peruvian deposits once zealously guarded by the Inca were rapidly depleted; elsewhere, the tiny island nation of Nauru was so intensively mined that the 2005 CIA World Factbook described it as a wasteland.

Today, rock phosphate has replaced guano and the US, China and Russia are the major suppliers. Deposits in the Western Sahara are the subject of territorial disputes with Morocco. Since 2004, China has surpassed the US in rock phosphate production, which has hit a 40-year low (US Geological Survey).

Despite dwindling global supplies, today's profligate phosphorus applications end up in runoff, resulting in blooms of toxic blue-green algae in lakes and waterways and contributing to oceanic "dead zones" around the globe. The Global Phosphorus Initiative estimates 80 percent of phosphorus is lost to inefficient use and calls for nutrient recycling.

Half of the phosphorus humans consume is excreted in urine and ends up in sewage. Sweden and Canada have been pioneering efforts at phosphorus recovery from municipal sewage. Designs for urine diverting and storing toilets are under study. Urine can safely be stored for several months and collected for agricultural use. (This recycling of plant nutrients from animal and human waste is nothing new. F. H. King describes in *Farmers of Forty Centuries* how the use of "night soil" in Asia has sustained Asian agriculture for millennia.) Other techniques such as using "phosphorus mining" cover crops like buckwheat that bring deep soil phosphorus to the surface can also reduce agricultural demand.

Most of the world's soils are phosphorus deficient and will require applications to meet increasing demands for food. As the US Geological Survey points out, there is no substitute. Deep sea phosphorus nodules are too expensive to exploit, while the remaining rock phosphate will become more expensive to extract and be of lesser quality due higher heavy metal content. Once again, human ingenuity will be called into play to avoid a major breakdown of global agricultural production.

*Robert Pelletier comments on science and politics from Clarenceville, Quebec.*

## Random

With Rick Smith

## thoughts



**First thought** I had reading that the Obamas will summer at Martha's Vineyard this year was, "How ironic is it that when Bush went on vacation to Crawford, the elite media camped out in his backyard - now when Obama goes on vacation on the Vineyard, he'll be camping out in the elite media's backyard."

**Read where** the Ghanians said this week that the title "Queen of the Cape Coast" they bestowed on Michelle Obama was purely ceremonial and honorary. Yeah right - just try telling her that.

**Good news** for New York taxpayers this week is now that the state senate stalemate has ended, they no longer have to pay 62 senators tens of thousands in salaries for doing nothing. Bad news for New York taxpayers this week is they still have to pay up to 700 teachers tens of millions in salaries for doing nothing.

**Bad news** last week for Secretary of State Hillary was she wasn't part of

Obama's European and African tour. Good news this week for Secretary of State Hillary was she wasn't part of Obama's European and African tour.

**First Lady** (and newly crowned Queen of the Cape Coast) Michelle Obama's minions are spinning that the reason the Russians weren't impressed with her "modest and neutral" wardrobe was because they were a bunch of anti-Americans who hate all things American. Yeah right - which explains why the lines for the first McDonalds over there were at least six time longer than the one for Lenin's Tomb.

**Jeopardy answer: 52%** Jeopardy question: What percentage of the American voters do you think would be dumb enough to believe that it was really Obama's 11-year-old daughter's idea to wear that no-nuke tee shirt around Rome?

**While Obama** was all over the media this week desperately trying reassure private health insurance companies that they shouldn't be afraid of his na-

tional healthcare plan, fellow socialist Bernie Sanders was on national television saying private health insurance companies should be very afraid of Obama's national healthcare plan. How much you want to wager that word from the White House is from now on the network news shows will be *sans* (without) Sanders?

**If a Martian** landed on earth this week and saw one political party's first lady on a boat deck, decked out in fisherman's waders and gutting a salmon—and the other sitting in an imperial palace, clutching a six thousand dollar purse and sampling caviar, which woman do you suppose he'd think represented the "party of the people"?

**In the Now Stop Me** If You've Heard This Before Department: Senator Kirsten Gillibrand is announcing a job creation plan. Ever notice that when Dems promise to create good paying jobs during an election, they're the only ones who end up with one after the election?