

# Environmental Issues

Environmental Studies Program

Denison University

Volume 5, Issue 2

Winter 2006

## Young Farmers Return to Denison

Amish farmer David Kline has been saying for years that a new generation of farmers will come out of liberal arts colleges like Denison, and [this fall] two of the people he's been waiting for returned to Granville.

Sarah Lechner, a 2002 graduate of Denison, grows food in a very poor section of Portland, Oregon, the city where I was raised. Among other things, she works with ten young people who raise salad greens for farmers markets as part of the larger St. Johns Woods Gardening Project. The people in St. Johns include several ethnic groups that value highly the chance to grow some of their own food. They are able to express some of their own cultural values by growing, harvesting, and cooking food, and many of them find working in the soil profoundly therapeutic as they struggle to hold their families together and make a living. Observers have found a connection between the urban gardening in Portland and decreases in violence, as well as reductions in gang activity.

Kristen Kordet graduated from Denison in 1999 and worked for a while in New York State on Roxbury Farm, which raises food for hundreds of people in New York City and Albany. Like Trish Mumme's Garden Patch Produce in Alexandria, Roxbury Farm is part of the Community Supported Agriculture movement. People pay an annual fee to a grower for a weekly supply of vegetables in season, sharing the risks that go with weather, pests, and other possible agricultural calamities. Sometimes CSA members help with the farming too.

Now Kordet runs her own CSA, Blue Moon Community Farm, with her partner, Jake Hoeksema, near Madison, Wisconsin. In addition to providing vegetables and roasting chickens to their CSA members, Kordet and Hoeksema supply restaurants, sell at a local farmers market, and work with children in a local school. "I am a farmer now, because I don't want to be anything else," Kordet says. "I'm not so much a grower but a witness to growth and beauty. Every day I am challenged and reminded how much I have to learn.

I've always loved the words of Kentucky poet-farmer Wendell Berry who said 'If we do not live where we work and when we work, then we are wasting our lives and our work too.' The best way to learn farming is to live like a farmer. Let it soak into your pores and fill your senses. Let it seduce you."



*Blue Moon Community Farm in Madison, WI*

Nostalgia for a way of life that has almost disappeared is not what draws Lechner and Kordet to farming. Instead, they share a hopeful vision of the future. As you hear them talk about their work, you are likely to recognize a remarkable compliment in David Kline's prediction that liberal arts colleges will produce a new generation of farmers.

These young women see alternatives to the degradation of farmland and destruction of farm communities, the eating disorders and obesity, the environmental injustice, and the energy crisis that are connected with industrial agriculture. They seek to show us that the food we eat deserves our time and care. And it seems likely that their confident sense that they can make a difference in a troubled world owes something to a kind of education that encourages active participation and lively skepticism in the face of narrow specialization. These two young farmers make a persuasive case for the liberal arts.

Bill Nichols, Professor Emeritus  
As seen in the Granville Sentinel

## Denisonians Plan Expedition to Mt. Denison

In 1923, while mapping the Aleutian mountain range for the United States Geologic Service (USGS), Harvard Professor Kirtly Mather had the opportunity to name the tallest peak in the range. Reminded of an Ohio hill he knew well, Mather called the mountain Denison, a tribute to his alma mater.

55 years later, a group of Denison students and faculty climbed the mountain – the first and only ascent that has been made. Now, Denison alum Chris Dickey ('03) is planning an expedition back to the mountain for a second ascent. Dickey plans to assemble a team of 10-12 people, including faculty, students, and even some alums from the first ascent in '78. He is currently working on getting financial support for the trip.

Dickey spoke with unbridled excitement about his plan: “We will have to fly into a beach, bush whack through dense swamp and forest, find a glacier, travel several miles up the glacier and then climb the mountain! There are no trails and no close by villages or human existence of any kind. It will truly be a great adventure and a very cool and unique piece of history for Denison” Dickey said.

He also spoke of why he is personally interested in arranging this trip. “...I want to use it as a means to generate some institutional pride at Denison. Give students, alumni and faculty something to be really proud of – I mean the school has a really cool mountain in Alaska and

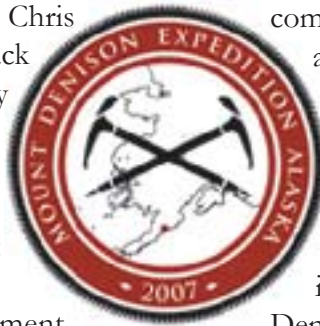
no one even knows about it!” he added.

The expedition, planned for May 2007, will be preceded by a training trip to Mt. Rainier in Washington this coming May. The purpose of this trip would be to gain experience and stamina for the leaders of the Mt. Denison expedition. The Mt. Denison climb, while quite strenuous, is not a technical climb, according to Dickey. It will, however, require team members to be physically comfortable on ice, back country terrain, and able to cope in an emergency situation.

Carrie Weaver, a current Denison student involved in planning the expedition, explained that the expedition has no true affiliation with the University because of the serious liability concerns involved, making this a Denison Community endeavor. The Denison association comes in the team – faculty, staff and students – and of course, the name. However, there is no official/financial support from Denison. Nonetheless, “Denison is home to us for four years... we can also identify our home with a mountain...that’s exceptional” said Weaver, adding, “It’s an amazing opportunity offered to Denison.

Organizing the expedition will involve several logistical, organizational, and public relations challenges. There are many opportunities for involvement outside of the expedition. The Mt. Denison Expedition is currently looking for prospective team members. For more information, email [mt.denison.2007@gmail.com](mailto:mt.denison.2007@gmail.com).

Caitlin Schroering '09



### Focus on Chris Dickey ('03)

Chris graduated from Denison’s ENVS program with the self-designed concentration, “Green Commerce”. His senior research focused on sustainable development and organizational culture through a case study of outdoor company, Patagonia, Inc. Chris held a myriad of jobs after graduation including stints as environmental educator in Puget Sound, ski-climbing magazine, The Alpinist in Jackson, shop employee in Seattle, and assistant for WY. Recently, Chris took a position as Director of Marketing and Sales at NEMO Equipment in Nashua, NH. NEMO is the first company to offer a new genre of tents which use Air in place of poles. NEMO’s Supported Technology (AST™) tents have been praised as the “fastest to setup, easiest to use, most compact and most repair-able three-season tents ever made.” Learn more about NEMO Equipment at [www.nemoequipment.com](http://www.nemoequipment.com).



*Sako by NEMO*

Outside of the office, Chris has gotten involved in adventure racing, an exhausting sport in which competitions span several days and involve a combination of orienteering, running, biking, paddling and climbing - whew! Chris is also busy planning the upcoming expedition to Mt. Denison.

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## Denison Takes a Natural Step

Thanks to the continuing support of the Mellon Foundation, Terry Gips, an ecologist, agricultural economist, sustainability business consultant and an independent Natural Step Framework instructor, visited Denison this fall.

A firm believer in sustainable living and building, Gips actively promotes sustainable practices across the nation. His work is based on the Natural Step Framework (NSF), a systems-thinking approach to sustainable living. NSF defines sustainability as “creating new ways to live and prosper while ensuring an equitable, healthy future for all people and the planet.”

NSF promotes four principals of a sustainable society in which (1) human needs are met worldwide, but without (2) increases in the extraction of materials from the Earth’s crust, (3) accumulation of waste produced by society, (4) physical degradation of the Earth.

While the NSF have been practiced in Sweden for over ten years, the U.S. struggles to put these principals into action. Terry’s work with the NSF demonstrates how these four principles act as guidelines for making more sustainable decisions. When they are considered in planning, designing, and daily life they can create some of the greenest innovations of our time.

Gips’ convocation focused on the feasibility of sustainability. Gips examined his life’s journey and in speaking about his various jobs – from mopping floors at a fast food joint to starting a community garden – Terry connected with seniors struggling with what to do post-graduation. One senior ENVS major noted that Terry helped him realize that his passion will carry him far, regardless of what he does right out of college.

Faculty members and administrators from all areas of the college also had the opportunity to learn more about sustainability during Gips’ visit. Terry highlighted the way in which college campuses are experimenting with green projects. The Natural Step has provided a basis for several campus greening projects that are reducing costs and increasing efficiency. As we move further into the 21st century, we hope the efforts of the Physical Plant, Green Team, DURP and Dining Services will move us toward a more sustainable Denison

Tiffany Finley ‘06

## Alumni Visit for Fireside Chat

Denison University alumni Greg Spyreas (’97) and Susan Studer King (’96) returned to the hill as special guests for a “Fireside Chat” this fall. The conversation throughout the evening focused on the current state of the environment in the US – and the future for those pursuing careers in environmental fields.

Spyreas, a botanist now working for the Natural Historical Society of Illinois, performs field-based inventories of plant species throughout preserved areas. Greg spoke scientifically about the environment and offered current students sage advice on pursuing graduate study, noting that a Master’s tends to lead to applied sciences, while a Ph.D. leads more often to theoretical work. Tiffany Finley, a senior ENVS major reflected that “after hearing the distinctions between the two future academic options, it really cleared up what I saw as my goals for myself.”

Studer King, who now works for the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC), delved into issues of environmental policy. She discussed the importance of internships in environmental fields which afford the opportunity to “try on” a variety of careers to see what fits and often lead to jobs – which is precisely how Susan got her start.

Susan and Greg agreed that the environment and the environmental movement have changed greatly in the past few decades. Susan reassured the group the difference is not necessarily bad. She commented on the many victories achieved through her career at OEC and warned students of the danger in getting weighed down by the negativity that surrounds many environmental issues.

Greg echoed Susans comments, and recognized a critical need for greater communication between scientists and politicians who speak entirely different languages. He encouraged those interested in both science and policy to pursue the pair jointly and help reconcile the differences. Overall, they both offered great insight into environmental career fields and their words of wisdom were greatly appreciated by those who attended this special Fireside Chat.

Sarah Edwards ‘06

### Environmental Issues

Newsletter of the McPhail Center for Environmental Studies

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## Alumni Spotlight: Justin Orion August '03

Since graduation Justin has been busy working in a variety of areas. After graduating from Denison, Justin worked in construction with his father as well as a student organizer for New Jersey Public Interest Research Group (NJPIRG). He recently completed a year in the AmeriCorps working with the Peninsula Habitat for Humanity, in the capacity of a construction site supervisor.



Currently, Justin resides in San Francisco and works as the Technology Manager for the Pesticide Action Network North America. In his free time he volunteers with the Alemany Community

Farm in San Francisco. Justin believes that the environmental studies program at Denison has helped him in many ways, but most importantly, given him a broad knowledge of environmental issues and the ability to think, reason and problem solve. The best part of his ENVS career, Justin says, was his Senior Capstone class which gave him the opportunity to visit Granville Intermediate School and teach kids about composting, land use, and life cycles.

Caitlin Schroering '09

ENVS alum are doing great things all around the world.  
Let us know what exciting things you are up to, we want to stay in touch:  
email [franksb@denison.edu](mailto:franksb@denison.edu)

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