



gailmarie
kimmel

local living
economy
project

a w a r e n e s s

Gailmarie Kimmel is a passionate environmentalist who believes that good business and sound environmental practices can co-exist.

As the founder and director of the Local Living Economy project and the creator of the "Be Local" coupon book, she is giving people the tools and education they need to take care of the planet and make a difference in problems such as climate change, rising energy costs and resource depletion.

"(Former Vice President) Al Gore is not the only one concerned with moral leadership," she told *Journey* in a recent interview. "It is also about rebuilding the web of trust and re-empowering the people who live in places, to be the decision makers of those places."

Growing up with parents who lived through the depression, Gailmarie learned early on to take care of and appreciate the things she had and to waste nothing. She continued to carry those ideas and values with her even after moving out on her own. Now, her husband lovingly calls her the "eco-queen" because she doesn't like to throw anything away.

While in her twenties, she had an experience that she described as turning her world "right-side up."

After getting a degree in biology from CSU, she joined the Peace Corps and was assigned to Thailand for two years. She felt fortunate to be there at a time the modern western world had not encroached much, allowing her to live a traditional agricultural life.

She saw how materially poor the people were, but at the same time, how spiritually rich they were. It showed her how a person can have a full life even without material possessions.

"I came back a very disoriented and angry young American," she said.

It took her years to figure out how to turn that anger into something productive. By combining her fierce loyalty to the natural world, the values instilled in her by her parents and her experience in Thailand, she had the tools needed to move forward and take action.

She eventually went on to get two master's degrees; one in adult education and the other in spirituality. Recently, she spent four years working at Colorado State University on a U.S. Forest Service research grant.

Toward the end of those four years, through the Rocky Mountain Sustainable Living Association, the nonprofit organization best known for the annual Sustainable Living Fair, she created the "Be Local" coupon books. This unique product promotes local stores, farmers, art groups and restaurants. It also shares the stories and histories behind some of the businesses.

The coupons in the book are designed to encourage people to support local merchants, in turn boosting the economy. In addition, because those using the book shop closer to home, they don't drive as far or have items shipped to them, reducing the environmental impact.

One of the most popular sections of the book is the "Eat Local" map. This section highlights restaurants that buy as much food as they can from local farmers, ranchers and dairies.

Gailmarie received a warm reception from the community with the "Be Local" books. She found people were ready and willing to explore other new approaches to economic development.

As a result, she began tracking the nationwide efforts of the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE), the umbrella organization for smaller groups that promote the concept of community self-reliance and environmentally responsible practices. Local Living Economy projects are designed to make sure that economic power is retained locally and that it helps sustain healthy community life, natural life and long-term economic viability.

It didn't take long before Gailmarie was sold on the idea. Once again, as part of the Rocky Mountain Sustainable Living Association, she became the director and founder of the Local Living Economy project (LLE) in Fort Collins.

"At that point I started recruiting for the Local Living Economy Network and within the first 5 months of just starting to put that out there and build the second 'Be Local' book, we ended up with 70 members," she said.

Her hope is that the LLE project takes hold and continues to grow.

"I look forward to working with these businesses," she said. "I find them to be a

talented, highly insightful, highly educated group of people. I am just curious what we can create together."

One goal of the LLE is to increase the use of locally produced foods, Gailmarie said.

"Currently, we are moving products from all over the globe," she said, "and that is having a huge impact on the environment."

She explained that food industry was a great place to begin exploring the idea of a self-reliant community because everyone must eat. People need to learn to live in a place and take advantage of the climate, soil and ingenuity of those around them, she said.

Each individual community cannot produce everything it needs, Gailmarie said, noting that bananas will never be grown in Fort Collins. But a community can meet many of its basic needs with local goods and services, she said, paying a bit more for the imported goods it cannot produce. This ensures that the banana grower's family, community and ecosystem are healthy, too, she said.

Gailmarie said businesses interested in being a part of the Local Living Economy project are typically those attentive not only to their financial bottom lines, but also to community health and the environment.

Gailmarie explained that one of the biggest problems is that many small, independent businesses, because of their size, aren't able to engage in environmentally sound practices. One of the purposes of the Local Living Economy Network is to help businesses work cooperatively.

"What if all the coffee shops collectively

bought the most biodegradable, eco-friendly coffee cup?" she said. "That would give them the kind of purchasing power to drive down the prices because of the volume and everyone could go green together. Everyone could do the right thing."

To get this idea to take hold, Gailmarie is working to involve the whole community. She has had discussions with the city, the downtown development authority and CSU about building a year-round permanent community market place where local cheeses, breads, honey, sauces, produce and other products could be purchased.

"Many great cities around the world are anchored by their market place," she said. "It's where commerce takes a human scale again. We get back to questions of livelihood and basic needs. Part of the redefining of economy is to pull it back to people generating livelihood in relationship to other people and to earth."

Gailmarie said people must remember that the challenges they face now can actually be an invitation to become more awake and stretch themselves outside of their comfort zones.

Her voice choked up when she talked about how the human race is behaving and what it is doing to the earth.

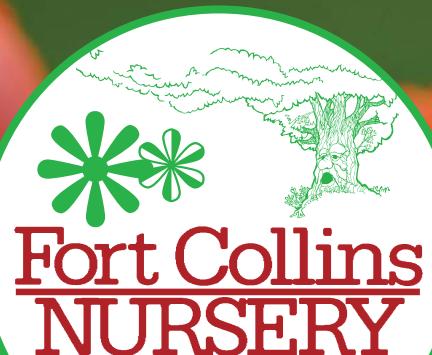
"We are not celebrating ourselves and we are not celebrating this glorious planet we have been gifted," she said.

For Gailmarie, the Local Living Economy project and BALLE provide her with hope that the community and country are putting forth an effort to move toward a more sustainable global economy. ♦

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