

Ecologue

NEWSLETTER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY

Volume 6, Number 2

Third Conference on Communication and Our Environment A Success

The publication of the Natural Resources Defense Council, **The Amicus Journal**, ran a lead article in its Spring 1995 issue on Chattanooga, the city they described as "the belle of the sustainable communities ball." In this article, readers were introduced to Chattanooga's successes, goals, and ongoing challenges which have placed this former Tennessee industrial city in the center of any discussion concerning the possibility of urban environmental revitalization. The article also introduced readers to David Crockett, the great-nephew of the famous frontiersman who as city councilperson is most associated with Chattanooga's rebirth as an environmental city.

From March 30 to April 2, 1995, Chattanooga, with its fantastic Freshwater aquarium, five-mile-long Riverwalk Park, historic Radisson Read House Hotel, and the dismembered Tennesseans, a forty year-old band whose teeshirt declares they perform "bluegrass music sung from the heart through the nose," provided an exciting site for the third Conference on Communication and our Environment.

Jimmie Killingsworth and his planning committee deserve considerable praise for developing a program that provided three days of stimulating, diverse, and challenging papers. David Sachman and the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga Department of Communication with the support of the University's George R. West Jr. Chair of Excellence in Communication and Public Affairs, the Chattanooga Times, the Chattanooga Free Press, and CARTA provided a wonderful environment for our scholarship by organizing a conference that provided participants with intellectual stimulation, fun, and an introduction to the city of Chattanooga and its dynamic citizens (including David Crockett), the mayor, editors of local newspapers, and the dismembered tennesseans.

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Into the Home Stretch to Gain Commission Status!

At the 1994 convention of the Speech Communication Association (SCA), held in New Orleans last November, a unanimous and enthusiastic group agreed to seek Environmental Communication Commission status under the SCA banner. If all goes as planned, the person we elect as Chairperson will present petitions signed by a minimum of 100 SCA members to the Legislative Council. If the petition is approved, the new commission will then send its Vice Chairperson to the Convention Planners Meeting which will then give the new commission control over selecting up to fifteen panels for the 1996 convention in San Diego. And that will add focus and legitimacy to environmental communication!

But First, A Few Necessary Tasks

Petition Signatures: To date, Sue Senecah has 52 petition signatures in hand. She needs a minimum of 100. Some people (i.e. volunteers to collect signatures at the regional conferences) simply have not returned the petitions. Others need to collect signatures from their colleagues. Enclosed with this **Ecologue** is a petition. Please sign the petition, if you have not done so already, and collect signatures from other SCA members in your department or college. Remember, though we would like those who sign the petition to continue supporting the Environmental Communication Commission at renewal time, signing the petition in no way obligates anyone to do so. A signature simply indicates that the idea should be given a chance. This petition drive is clearly the litmus test of whether this is the appropriate time to attempt to launch a commission. Please send all petition forms to Sue Senecah, her address is on the bottom of the petition form.

Commission Officers: In the likely event of being granted commission status, we must have a

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A Successful Conference *(continued)*

The proceedings from the conference will be available in print shortly through the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga. I strongly recommend, if you did not attend the conference, to order this collection of papers that covers a diversity of topics including rediscovering Rachel Carson's **Silent Spring**, the Wise Use Movement, risk assessment and environmental communication, media coverage of environmental issues, environmental education, the use of expert testimony and its effectiveness, and careers in environmental communication.

One of the highlights of the conference was an alarming, but highly informative speech given by Robert Cox, communication scholar and current president of the Sierra Club, in which he outlined the anti-environmental agenda of the current Congress. Cox argued, despite the fact that the environment is not even mentioned in the Contract With America, many of the provisions of that document have far reaching detrimental environmental goals. He was especially critical of the Job Creation and Wage Enhancement Act which puts environmental issues in a lessened position in relation to economic concerns, and the Takings Bill which will dismantle the current environmental laws under the guise of individual and property rights. Cox was particularly eloquent in his analysis of how the current Congress and the Wise Use movement have been effective in making concepts such as the "common good" sound like expressions of socialism, while they argue a new and aggressive form of social Darwinism and apply it to society and the environment as well. The argument states that if a species such as the spotted owl cannot adapt to human encroachment, then it deserves to disappear. Vulnerable environments, species, and people do not deserve to survive in the brave new world of the Congress.

Cox suggested a number of issues that communication scholars committed to the environment need to think about in order to become activists and help fight this trend. First he reasserts the necessity for a common interest in quality scholarship. We often rely, he said, on popularized accounts, and thus, lose our credibility because we fail to understand the multi-faceted and complex communication forces at work. Second, he argued that the paradigm of communication needs to be critically analyzed. He asked: How can empowered voices emerge? How are voices silenced. How are

new narratives invented? How can we change the way the environment is talked about to include new narratives and voices? We must find ways to speak for the Earth and discover new and persuasive ways for the environment to be talked about.

Sue Senecah, Planning Chair for the next conference, is already busy organizing a committee and gathering suggestions for the next conference which will be held in the wilds of New York. Based on my experience attending all three of the conferences, I might suggest that in an attempt to involve a wide variety of people from different perspectives and occupations, the conference must not lose a clear focus. Communication scholarship must continue to be the primary focus of the conference. The risk is that, in an attempt to become so diverse, it becomes difficult to find basic points of mutual concern. In addition to clarity of focus, we still need to respond to a challenge expressed by Chris Oravec back at the Alta conference and reiterated by Cox this year concerning the unique qualities of environmental discourse. As Chris stated in her response to a panel in 1991: "If this were the best of all possible worlds, I would do several important things in this response. First I would define a subject area called the communicative analysis of environmental discourse. To do so, I would establish a set of content topics, a standard reference area, and a list of common sources. Next, I would construct an environmentally-based theory and method for this new subject area. I would do this not just by borrowing concepts and terms from established theories, but by developing a uniquely ecological orientation. Finally, I would assess...with respect to these foundational purposes and goals. The result would be a comprehensive position statement that would establish a new subdiscipline in discourse and communicative studies, and would say something to mainstream environmental studies as well." We need to reenergize this analysis in future conferences.

I look forward to the proceedings from the Chattanooga conference, and encourage all of you to begin planning to attend the next meeting in New York. I defy anyone interested in the environment and the study of communication to find three more challenging days.

-Bruce Weaver

A Few Tasks (Continued)

slate of officers ready to submit to the SCALegislative Council. According to the SCA bylaws, the new commission will need:

1) A **Chairperson** whose responsibilities will include presiding over the annual commission meeting, serving as representative to the Legislative Council, presenting an annual report to the Legislative Council, and discharging the normal duties of Chair.

2) A Vice Chairperson who will work with the First Vice President of SCA to plan that portion of the annual meeting for which the commission is responsible.

3) A **Secretary** who shall perform the customary duties of that office.

No later than **October 1, 1995**, nominate yourself or others (with their permission) and submit the names to Sue Senecah by phone at (315) 470-6570, by e-mail at ssenecah@mailbox.syr.edu, or by snail-mail (Environmental Studies, Marshall 107, SUNY-ESF, Syracuse, New York, 13210). You will receive a ballot which must be returned no later than **November 1, 1995**. A short **Ecologue** will then be published just prior to the SCA convention to announce the new officers and to highlight conference events.

Sue Senecah & Michael Netzley

Environmental Communication is Now On-Line!

Anyone interested in communication and the environment can now "chat" with each other via computer thanks to Mark Meisner of the faculty of Environmental Studies at York University in Toronto. Dubbed COCE (Conference on Communication and Environment), this unmoderated public LISTSERV will be extremely useful for several reasons:

1) To promote communication and coordination among folks interested in the biennial Conference on Communication and Our Environment (the fourth to be held in Syracuse in 1997)

2) To exchange information on environmental communication

3) To announce calls for papers and other opportunities

4) To request information or assistance

5) To critique books, films, and articles

6) To discuss other assorted environmental topics.

To subscribe, send an e-mail message to the following address: **LISTSERV@YORKU.CA**
Leave the subject line blank. In the message include only the following (i.e. do not include a signature):

**SUBSCRIBE COCE-L FIRST NAME
LAST NAME**

For example, SUBSCRIBE COCE-L RACHEL
CARSON.

If your subscription is successful, you will receive a return message. If you have problems, contact Mark at:

es051026@orion.yorku.ca

This list will be the main conduit for planning the next conference, so if you are on the list you will be in the midst of the action. Let's take advantage of this list and stay in contact with one another. Additionally, be sure to pass this information on to other interested parties.

Finally, let's all give a special thanks to Mark Meisner for taking the time to set-up and coordinate LISTSERV!

Upcoming Issues

In an upcoming issue of **Ecologue**, look for a review of Lawrence Buell's new book **The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture** (Harvard UP, 1995).

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