



hand to hand

ASSOCIATION OF CHILDREN'S MUSEUMS

Sustainability embraces and trumps all other health issues, mostly because the majority of health issues facing children today can be traced back to the degradation of our environment and to our fast-paced, unsustainable lifestyles. While we're treating the illnesses, we should also tackle the root cause.

Obesity, asthma, childhood cancers, diabetes, ADD, which are all on the rise, have profound links to the environment.

As such, sustainability should be at the very core of our operating practices and our institutional health initiatives.

As luck would have it, I re-read *The Lorax* and *A Sand County Almanac* in tandem recently, as part of separate community celebrations honoring the authors of two of my favorite books. At first glance, one might think that the Sneetch inventor and zany word maker-upper might have little in common with Aldo Leopold, the revered naturalist, whose keen observations of the natural world make you feel like you're there, mouth agape, touching, smelling and seeing the earth for the first time. While Dr. Seuss is considered by many children to be the most beloved author and illustrator of all time, Leopold, who wrote *A Sand County Almanac* between 1941 and 1947, is considered the father of the United States wilderness system and one of the most influential conservation thinkers of the twentieth century.



Aldo Leopold at the "Shack" in Baraboo, Wisconsin, circa 1940.



Sculpture of the Lorax by Lark Grey Dimond-Cates, stepdaughter of Theodor Geisel, in the Dr. Seuss Memorial Sculpture Garden, Springfield, Massachusetts.

lifestyles. While we're treating the illnesses, we should also tackle the root cause. Obesity, asthma, childhood cancers, diabetes, ADD, which are all on the rise, have profound links to the environment. As such, sustainability should be at the very core of our operating practices and our institutional health initiatives.

What Would Leopold and Seuss Think?

Predicted increases in world population over the next century, along with the attainment of peak oil production and the increasing demands that we're putting on our ecosystem, will provide our children with challenges far beyond the scope of anything we have encountered in human history. Since 2005 ranked as the hottest year on record, there is little debate within the scientific community about the impending impacts of global warming. The number one challenge that will face the children we currently serve as they enter adulthood will be how to reconcile the

Learning from Leopold and Seuss

Brenda Baker, Guest Editor
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In his vivid descriptions of his family's restoration of an old shack and its surrounding land, Leopold, the perennial philosopher, gets at the heart of all things wild with deep respect, love and passion. He calls upon the reader to get to know the land, love the land and ultimately, conserve the land. In *The Lorax*, the greedy Once-ler begins chopping truffula trees faster and faster to make "Thneeds," something, it turns out, no one really needs. Before long, all of the trees and animals are gone, the Thneed factory closes and only one truffula seed remains in the desecrated land. Seuss calls upon the reader to take that seed, plant it with love and nourish it in hope that someday the truffula trees and animals will return. Despite their wildly different styles, I couldn't help but join Dr. Seuss and Aldo Leopold at the hip, imagine them in conversation, and begin seeing their parallel messages of hope, individual responsibility, ethics and preservation of our biotic community as one and the same. It's a message that has urgency and relevance in my own life and work, and I believe, to the children's museum field at large.

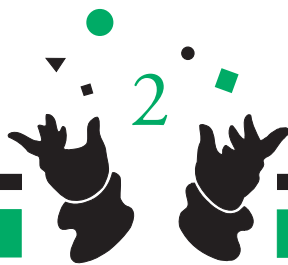
When I look around me, I am inspired by many children's museums around the country following in step with Seuss and Leopold, dishing up creative and varied work in the spirit of respecting children of future generations, and in the name of sustainable, "green" or "ecological" design. Sustainability, which can be defined as

meeting the needs of the current generation without compromising the needs of future generations, is about taking the long view, seeing the world as interconnected, thinking carefully about the choices we make and their impacts and recognizing that healthy children are the natural outcome of a healthy biotic community. It's a complex subject requiring new awareness of the earth's integrated natural systems, the delicate balance between individual and collective actions and the ways those choices will affect our children and our environment.

In the spirit of this year's InterActivity theme "Growing Healthy Kids, Museums and Communities," the Association of Children's Museums has developed a conference program that explores the critical role that physical and emotional health plays in growing healthy children, healthy museums and healthy communities. This issue of *Hand to Hand* will highlight how sustainability practices are part of a growing movement within our field to address these interrelated health issues through the way we work. Sustainability embraces and trumps all other health issues, mostly because the majority of health issues facing children today can be traced back to the degradation of our environment and to our fast-paced, unsustainable

impact of their daily lives with the limitations of our global ecosystems.

What would Seuss and Leopold make of this predicament? How can one person, one institution, or one field make a difference? Seuss's Lorax would say as he passes off the last truffula seed, "UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." And Leopold, nodding in agreement, might say that "it's only individuals, taking responsibility for their part of the larger community, upon which our survival depends." Seuss would blurt out in rhyming verse that we should stop making Thneeds, though it's something we think everyone needs. And Leopold would subtly add that it's only in getting rid of our Thneeds, that we can actually see the beauty of the world around us. They would talk some more and both wind up with the same conclusion: that you can only make ethical decisions in relation to something that you love, see, feel, respect, admire, understand and have faith in (Leopold 1949). If, as a field, we can weave ecological design through everything we do, we can reconnect kids to the earth so that they too have compassion, love and respect, the core ingredients for becoming stewards of the land.



Our Greening Field

The leaders in the our field's sustainable design movement are stretching Seuss and Leopold's hopeful vision in inventive and thoughtful ways, taking it upon themselves to make sweeping changes within their organizations, upholding high ethical standards to create healthier futures for children of all species. With a deep respect and love for children at the core of their work, children's museums, along with nature centers, have already taken the lead within the larger museum field, and comprise the large majority of recent and current sustainable design projects (Guarinello 2005).

This issue of *Hand to Hand* highlights aspects of these inspiring green design projects, processes and ideas, and supplements the www.greenexhibits.org Web site and toolkit that was developed last year by Madison Children's Museum as part of its MetLife Foundation and ACM Promising Practice Replication Award for sustainable design. The Web site, an online resource guide for museums interested in starting sustainable design projects, includes a compendium of work by children's museums in the field to date, a host of information about getting started and a comprehensive index of where to find alternative building supplies. The Web site was developed with a sense of community in mind, and we welcome your contributions. If you haven't taken a look yet, the resources and links you find will help you get started on greening your museum, with projects large and small.

While the vast majority of current green projects around the country involve new construction or building renovation, there are many others that focus on green exhibit design and construction, tackling indoor air quality, forging partnerships with green organizations, instituting green incentives for employees, working with the local community to tackle environmental and social problems and creating more green space as part of their mission. Whether it's starting a worm/composting bin in the staff kitchen, switching to no-VOC (volatile organic chemicals) paint, or undertaking a fifty million dollar capital campaign for a green building, it is the intention that matters most. Sustainability isn't about getting it all right. It's about starting—doing something.

The children's museums you'll read about in this issue all have one thing in common: they are all taking a strategically "local" approach to ecological design, using local resources, local materials and local knowledge to support their museums and communities. This isn't to say that everything is being built from scratch in museums' basements or that museums should disconnect from larger support systems, but that by working locally, they're shortening supply lines, a key ingredient to being sustainable.

At Madison Children's Museum, we are taking steps in our current building and practices, while we work on our green expansion project, which will open in four years. Aside from continuing and expanding our green design and fabrication practices, we've offered a discussion course for employees and community members called "Healthy Children, Healthy Planet." The museum has also joined Community Car, a member-based car sharing program, so staff members can bike to work and still have access to a vehicle when needed. We've continued updating www.greenexhibits.org, and actively solicited local contractors, arming them with our ecological requirements, so they're ready when we need them. But mostly we're dreaming and scheming about our "new" 1929 Montgomery Ward building and how we can take it further and have more beneficial impact on kids' lives with less impact on the planet.

In the articles included in this issue, you'll learn how a green agenda can be a galvanizing force within an insti-

tuition, a field and a community. Sharon Klotz, Director of Exhibits at Brooklyn Children's Museum (BCM), takes you on a whirlwind tour of the process and decision making strategies that were employed by BCM as they've undertaken New York City's first green museum. In her article, "Growing Up Green," Sharon highlights green features of Brooklyn's new building and exhibits and examines how the design team gauged and weighed choices about sustainability. Neil Gordon's article "Green Buildings, Green Kids" shows how the Boston Children's Museum is using its green expansion project as a way to do something larger than simply "greening" the institution. By capturing, treating and reusing storm water on the site, BCM's project will simultaneously help keep Fort Point Channel clean, demonstrate stewardship of the environment, educate kids and teachers about Boston harbor, and complement a whole set of community and programmatic goals.

Jane Werner, executive director of the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, gives you an overview of what it's like to keep the momentum up once the doors to a green building are open, with practical tips regarding ongoing sustainability efforts. Her article discusses cleaning, community programs related to green initiatives, community partnerships and incentives for employees, and it discusses the sometimes difficult trade-offs that need to be made regarding sustainability. Dave Judy of Kohl Children's Museum of Greater Chicago lays bare the challenges of calling attention to green processes in a building where many of the green features are virtually unseen.

In separate Case Studies, we'll see highlights of new sustainable design projects from four children's museums around the country, including Children's Discovery Museum, in Normal, Illinois, which just opened as our country's first LEED certified and silver-rated children's museum. Other impressive new green building case studies include Strong Museum in Rochester, New York; Discovery Center Museum of Rockford, Illinois; and the Shenandoah Valley Discovery Museum in Winchester, Virginia.

As all of these projects will demonstrate, sustainability can be a rallying force within an organization, and working locally will only enhance the community's commitment.

I'm beginning to think that maybe "local" is really the next logical progression, the next mantra for our field. It supports the town square concept, but pushes it further in this age of importation. As the effects of globalization are eventually understood, socially, environmentally and economically, maybe self-reliance, the idea of blooming where you're planted, and working within our bioregions will be the truffle seed that sticks.

Brenda Baker has overseen Madison Children's Museum's exhibit department for the past sixteen years. She's an avid bicycle commuter and athlete, artist, environmentalist and mother of two young boys. When she's not tending to one of those occupations, she pulls weeds in her family's overgrown garden or works on remodeling their 120-year-old house with reclaimed building materials, including a former high school basketball floor in the kitchen.

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Green Design + Sustainability

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Association of Children's Museums

The Association of Children's Museums (ACM) is a professional service organization that endeavors to expand the capacity and further the vision of children's museums. ACM's mission is to build the capacity of children's museums to serve as town squares where play inspires creativity and lifelong learning. Membership is primarily children's museums, but includes other museums with an interest in both child and family audiences, individuals and corporate members.

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Steve Mamske



All of the articles that appear in this issue of *Hand to Hand* will be available as downloadable pdf's at www.greenexhibits.org after InterActivity.