



## Bioneers Brings New Life

By Rachel Stern, Science Interchange Reporter

(This article has not yet been published.)

An inspiring wake-up call occurred for me on October 19, 2002. I spent that day at the 13th Annual Bioneer's Conference located at the Marin Civic Center.

The conference of "biological pioneers," which took place October 18 through October 20, was a thriving example that people, no matter how small or Herculean their efforts, can make change happen. Thousands of ideas for the betterment of society and the environment, expressed in the form of posters, pamphlets and people unafraid to speak their minds, enlivened the atmosphere with tangible optimism.

Tents were set up for an array of speakers to convey their opinions, ranging on topics from bringing more organic food into local supermarkets to potential war in Iraq. The speakers included Fritjof Capra, co-founder of the Center for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley; Sebastiao Salgado, a world renown humanitarian photographer; Nina Simons, co-founder of the Bioneers Conference; and Julia Butterfly Hill, the "tree sitter" who was involved with the Youth Tent this year.

Activist Max Harper, recipient of a Brower Youth Award, couldn't miss such an event.

"We need a conference like Bioneers to bring together a strong environmental movement," said Harper, 20, who leads the Student Environmental Organization at Colorado College. "I'm excited to see all these people having a good time and realizing that the whole sustainability gig depends on community."

Attendees put in a group effort to make the conference sustainable. There was a three to one ratio of recycling centers to trashcans. Every trashcan I passed remained virtually empty, while the recycling bins overflowed with the waste of environmentally conscious citizens.

"We're trying to make this festival more sustainable," said Jeremy Spoon, an educator for the Marin Conservation Corps, which set up the recycling centers. He was armed with facts such as "if deforestation continues at current rates, scientists estimate that all tropical rainforest ecosystems will be destroyed by the year 2030."

Spoon, who calls conservation "a drive from the heart," said, "I don't think we can conserve the environment unless people learn and use the knowledge to live sustainably."

In the exhibit hall, rows upon rows of vendors contributed to sustainability as they promoted and sold a variety of earth and social friendly products, such as classic Birkenstocks, organic food and plenty of hemp.

“I’m here to get exposure to new ideas and new people,” said Martin Vorque, who set up a booth that passed out tasty organic apples and oranges. Vorque works for the Ecology Center in Berkeley, which holds an organic farmers’ market every week. In 1973, he started a curbside recycling program that still holds one of the only nonprofit recycling contracts in the country.

Walking around the exhibit hall, I could sense the incredible energy radiating from the people of all ages, colors, backgrounds and experiences. Young and old alike gathered to talk about the world. Everyone seemed to share the same integral passion for life, which came out in their talk.

“My favorite part of the conference is the inspiration and excitement I’m getting from all around me,” said Abby Wing, an activist who is working with a series of organizations in the Bay Area to promote global justice. Wing had just finished attending a session called “Biodiversity and People” when I talked to her. She was deeply impressed by it, as well as the other sessions she attended.

“A major source of my inspiration has been the interconnectedness of the topics,” said Wing, a soft-spoken woman with a warm disposition who appeared to be in her mid-twenties. All day, she said, she walked around the conference, informing people of a protest she helped set up called “Yes to Life and No to Free Trade Area of the Americas.”

By the Youth Tent, I saw Julia Butterfly Hill, the woman who sat for just over two years in a giant redwood she named Luna, to save it from logging. She led a workshop on youth activism with Native American activist Clayton Thomas-Muller.

I’m a seventeen-year-old activist, and Julia has been one of my sources of inspiration. She admitted that there is plenty wrong with the world, yet instead of addressing it cynically, she spoke joyfully, stressing the significance of every moment. She spoke of how our smallest actions, such as smiling at a stranger, make a big difference. She said we can all be leaders.

I left the conference that night pumped up to take on the world, one step at a time.

As Harper, the student from Colorado, said, “We’ll all know we’re walking on the right path when we’re walking together.”

## RESOURCES

Bioneers: [www.bioneers.org](http://www.bioneers.org)

Sustainability Education Center: [www.sustainabilityed.org](http://www.sustainabilityed.org)