



Summer 2017

## BLUE RIDGE ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE LEAGUE

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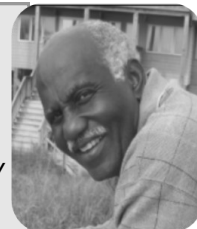
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## Racial Equity

### A Gateway to Environmental Justice

By Charles Utley



**Racial equity** is even a more difficult topic than social justice. It often gets confused with **racial** equality, equal opportunity or equal net worth, which are different. Achieving greater **racial equity** means achieving greater social justice.

Racial Equity is more easily said than done. The **Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)** is an [African-American civil rights](#) organization in the United States that played a pivotal role for [African Americans](#) in the [Civil Rights Movement](#). Founded in 1942, its stated mission is “to bring about equality for all people regardless of race, creed, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, religion or ethnic background.” A racially equitable society is one which the distribution of resources, opportunities and burdens are not determined or predicted by race. These seemingly fundamental rights would have difficulty being accepted by the American people and throughout the world. To be willing to see all human beings as having an equal right to Justice in the world system with equality.

This is a major problem that still plagues our society and particularly our communities of color. We must build relationships to counteract those age-old wedge tactics that have divided individuals by the color of their skin. Relationships that takes us out of our comfort zone to cross racial barriers. To remove the stigma of 11:00 AM Sunday morning as being the most “*segregated hour*” of the week in our country. Until we focus on the things that are designed to keep us separated we will always have issues with one another. We must recognize and acknowledge the existence of structural racism, analyze the impact and develop strategies to improve the outcome for all racial identities. Pathways to Environmental Justice will depend on this analytical approach to the realization of all possibilities for all people. As community organizers for Environmental Justice,

we must realize that we all share a common enemy: racism. It is not the same as “ethnicity” which is based on ancestry, tradition and language. The term “White” was created to give Europeans common identity which came with rights and benefits not available to Africans, indigenous people and people of color. We have to make an assertive effort to shift from focus on racial divide and focus on racial equality.

“Fewer than one in three black Americans and not even half of whites say the United States has made ‘a lot’ of progress toward achieving racial equality in the half-century since the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. declared he had ‘a dream’ that one day freedom, justice and brotherhood would prevail and that his children would ‘not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.’”\*

It is still a work in progress because, studies show that blacks and whites generally agree that the two races get along well, but about 7 in 10 blacks and more than 1 in 4 whites also concur that blacks are treated unequally by the criminal justice system. A majority of blacks also say they are treated less fairly than whites in public schools and in the workplace. Fully 1 in 3 blacks, 1 in 5 Hispanic Americans and 1 in 10 whites said they were treated unfairly within the last year because of perceptions of their race.

Yes, we must rise above the racial barriers, but not become a nation of people who are colorblind. Being colorblind means that needs are met with resources and responses that are exactly the same for all people. Equity accounts for the differences in opportunity and other obstacles. We must build partnerships and relationships based on common issues, not on skin color or nationality but what is equal and just for all.

(continued on page 4)



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### **BREDL: Who and what we are**

In March 1984, fifty citizens of Ashe and Watauga Counties met in the Mission House of Holy Trinity Church in Glendale Springs, North Carolina. Teachers and farmers, home-makers and merchants listened to the report of the Episcopal Church Women on the US Department of Energy's siting search for a high-level nuclear waste dump in the rain-rich east.

Recognizing that the North Carolina mountains were a region at risk, the assembled group organized the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League (BREDL) to protect their own backyard and those of other threatened communities.

Grassroots organizing was a cornerstone of our early all-volunteer organization. One of our first multi-county boards of directors adopted our credo, which embodies our mission statement:

### **BREDL Credo**

We believe in the practice of earth stewardship, not only by our league members, but by our government and the public as well. To foster stewardship, BREDL encourages government and citizen responsibility in conserving and protecting our natural resources. BREDL advocates grassroots involvement in order to empower whole communities in environmental issues. BREDL functions as a "watchdog" of the environment, monitoring issues and holding government officials accountable for their actions. BREDL networks with citizen groups and agencies, collecting and disseminating accurate, timely information.

BREDL sets standards for environmental quality, and awards individuals and agencies who uphold these standards in practice.

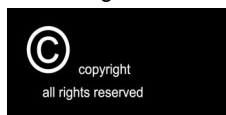
### **Moving into the future**

Since then, the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League has grown to be a regional community-based, nonprofit environmental organization. Our founding principles - earth stewardship, environmental democracy, social justice and community empowerment - still guide our work for social change. Our staff and volunteers put into practice the ideals of love of community and love of neighbor, which help us to serve the movement for environmental protection and progressive social change in Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee.

### **Grassroots Campaigns**

Nothing creates hopefulness out of helplessness like a successful grassroots campaign - and our chapters have a history of winning. For over twenty-eight years Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League chapters have protected their communities by stopping dangerous facilities and promoting safe alternatives.

In the 1980's and 1990's, BREDL prevented a multi-state ThermalKEM hazardous waste incinerator, a southeastern nuclear waste dump and a national nuclear waste dump. In the 2000's, our coordinated grassroots citizens' campaigns have had further victories. We won a legislative victory with the passage of the NC Solid Waste Act, effectively blocking at least four multi-state mega-dumps. Our Person County chapter convinced their Board of Commissioners to reject expansion of the Republic Services landfill. Our Cascade, Virginia, chapter shut down a huge hazardous waste incinerator. We eliminated mercury waste from the Stericycle incinerator, shut down a tire incinerator in Martinsville, won the landmark environmental justice court decision in Greene County, NC. Further, with our chapters we have protected air quality by blocking scores of asphalt plants, four medical waste incinerators, a PVC plant and a lead smelter, and passage by local governments of eight polluting industries ordinances. Our work on nuclear power and coal plants laid the groundwork for our new Safe Energy Campaign. Victories over twenty-four mega-dumps have resulted in our affirmative Zero Waste Campaign. Guided by the principles of earth stewardship and environmental justice, we have learned that empowering whole communities with effective grassroots campaigns is the most effective strategy for lasting change.



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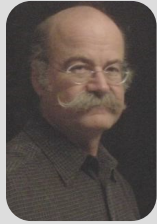
#### **Community Organizers**

Sharon Ponton

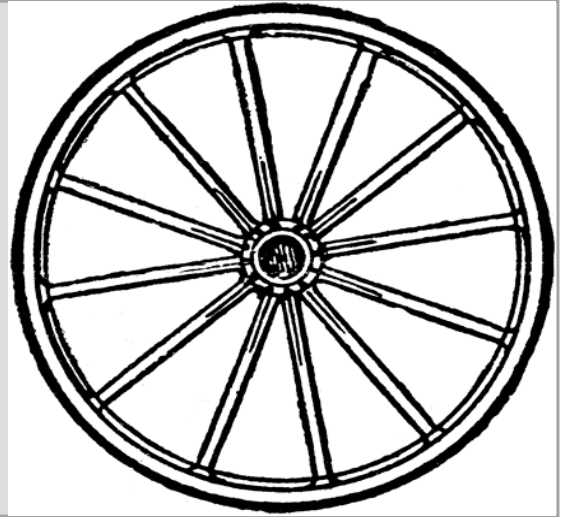
Michael James-Deramo

# League Line Director's Report

Louis A. Zeller, July 2, 2017



## Notes from the field: Giving to the present



### *Re-inventing the wheel*

"We don't need to re-invent the wheel," an advocate told me seeking to build support for an environmental initiative. But it was a false logic often accepted as practical wisdom. Oftentimes, it is neither practical nor wise. It can be a lazy method of organizing which finds activists going to the same well over and over again; eventually it runs dry because there is only so much a set group of people can do.

In fact, re-inventing the wheel is the way to alter the status quo and create new possibilities. It is to go from unicycle to bicycle to tricycle. It is a way to create a much more stable basis for organizing a community that can go the distance. Granted: If we have the resources and the numbers necessary to, say, force the passage of legislation, then we can contact the groups already familiar with the issue and win the vote and pass the bill. This is organizing the organized. But if we

do not have this ready-made constituency—if we need more people dissatisfied with existing rules, plans or laws to halt an environmental catastrophe—we need to add more wheels to our vehicle.

### *Expanding the base*

It is not uncommon to find a community in a negative mode, and it often remains there unless someone points out that they are lacerating their own potential effectiveness and stewing in their own grease. Exposing this bias by repeating back to them their own negative statements is a way to get folks thinking positively. When I heard, "We went door-to-door and those folks didn't know anything!" I stopped them right there. The fact that "they" didn't know something was not bad. They just hadn't heard about it yet, and you were the first to tell them. Do not undercut yourself.

Again, engaging uninvolved, uninformed or unorganized people is the route to expanding the base, building strength and altering the balance of power. Preaching to the choir is not. Involving people who are closest to and affected by the problem addresses root causes—pollution as a social problem—and fosters people taking control of their lives. Putting the bulk of our efforts into community organizing is the most effective and democratic way to bring such social change, an outcome which advocacy alone cannot match.

*This insane generosity is the generosity of rebellion, which unhesitatingly gives the strength of its love and without a moment's delay refuses injustice. Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present. —Albert Camus ■*

Racial Equity is seen through the eyes of two of our young interns, one from China and the other from America. They shared their perspective on Racial Equity at a workshop sponsored by the Concerned Citizens of Shell Bluff. The interns listened and participated with the group and gave their opinions on Racial Equity.

Jingting Xiong, an intern student working with Mr. Louis Zeller, Executive Director of Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, quotes Racial Equity as; *“Race and ethnic groups are easy because they are obvious. It’s the same case with gender. People need to be exposed to the mixed-race anguish to experience and learn from each other, so that the barriers of races can be broken through genuine love and trust. Preferential policies are not the solution, instead they worsen the situation in some way, however that may be the only way to start in order to let people from different races mix.”*

Tashauna Smith, an intern working with Mr. Charles Utley viewed the workshop on Racial Equity said: *“It is important for all Americans to come together as one, no matter of race, to reach outside of racial comfort. By working together to share ideas, to solve problems and to maintain a safe and contaminated free environment for the future.”*

Both young interns realize that we must hold the banner up high for Environmental Justice for all people. Realizing that Environmental Justice law indicates that “the disproportionate impacts of air pollution should be offset by greater attention to pollution sources and the reduction of air pollution

wherever possible. Advocates nationwide argue that because poor people of color bear a disproportionate burden of air pollution, their communities should receive a disproportionate share of money and technology to reduce toxic emissions and that laws including the Clean Air Act should close loopholes that allow facilities to escape pollution controls.”\*\*

Are you ready to extend your hand across racial barriers, move out of your comfort zone, remove structural racism and achieve racial unity for all?

I invite all to join in the motto of the Concerned Citizens of Shell Bluff and use this as a gateway to Environmental Justice. We believe that everyone is equal in the sight of God. We depend on the promises of the Bible; “That everything works together for the good of those who love the Lord.” We believe in standing for human rights, health and environment and preservation of our natural resources provided by the Creator. However great a task it may become, our stewardship will be fulfilled.

*Charles Utley, Community Organizer*

\*Sam Roberts, *New York Times*, “Race Equality Is Still a Work in Progress, Survey Finds” Aug. 22, 2013

\*\* *Environmental Justice for All: A Fifty State Survey of Legislation, Policies and Cases*, Fourth Edition, University of California-Hastings College of the Law, February 15, 2010

## Welcome BREDL's Student Interns



About Tashauna Smith, Paine College

Tashauna Smith Moved from Johnstown, Pa to Georgia her senior year of high school to better her life. She said, "Life was tough living in a town with nothing but negativity and violence". In 2015, She graduated from Jefferson High School in Jefferson, GA with honor of her athlete abilities. With help from her team and coaches, Tashauna broke Six Track and Field school records. She received a two-year track scholarship to Paine College in Augusta, GA. She studies Biology at Paine College as well as being an athlete. Her goal is to further her education in biology to become a nurse and an environmentalist.



**Name:** Midhun Athikkal, Duke University

**Position:** Environmental Justice Communications Coordinator

**Bio:** Born in Kerala, India and brought up in Qatar, I completed my undergraduate studies in Mechanical Engineering from NIT W. I worked at Larsen & Toubro Limited for 4 years. I have experience in marketing & business development, project management and consulting. I enjoy playing soccer, travelling around the world, and listening to music.

**Intern Project:** As an environmental justice communications coordinator, I am assisting in research, development, and implementation of an efficient communication platform for chapters advocating against the Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

**Goal:** The goal of the project is to get information to the communities affected by the Atlantic coast pipeline, so that they can make well informed decisions.

# NUCLEAR UPDATE

## League Petitions NRC to Oppose TVA Reactors at Clinch River

On June 12, 2017, the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League submitted a legal Petition to the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission to Intervene in Tennessee Valley Authority's plans for so-called small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs) at the Clinch River Nuclear Site near Knoxville.

The petition states, "TVA has not fulfilled its NEPA obligation to provide a detailed, accurate statement, with particularity to the no-build option." The option of not approving a project, the no-action alternative, is required to be included under the National Environmental Policy Act.

In its site permit application, TVA cited Executive Order 13636, "Improving Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity," and Executive Order 13693, "Planning for Federal Sustainability in the Next Decade." Executive Director Lou Zeller, author of the 13-page petition, said, "TVA is trying to justify this project as solution to global warming and to benefit energy security. What it does is undermine both."

BREDL member Jake Almond lives within two miles of the site. Board Vice President Sandy Kurtz tracked him down following a public hearing in Oak Ridge and invited him to sign a declaration of standing to support the legal action.

The SMR is an untested, experimental source of atomic power contemplated by TVA for the site. It is fraught with reduced safety margins. SMR passive cooling systems do not have active backup systems. The weaker containment of SMRs has a greater chance of damage from hydrogen explosions. Underground siting increases risk during flooding. And multiple SMRs present higher risk from reduced support staff or safety equipment. Details can be seen in our comments posted at <http://www.bredl.org>

TVA attorneys and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission staff have until July 7 to reply. Intervenors will then have until July 25<sup>th</sup> to file answers to their replies. The Atomic Safety and Licensing Board could schedule oral arguments this summer. ■



# Nuclear Power

## Too Hot To Handle

*By Charles Utley*

Environmental Justice Coordinator



Who gets to foot the nuclear bill now that Westinghouse Electric Corporation has filed for bankruptcy? The company filed in March but the details are still to be worked out. This American manufacturing giant was founded in 1886 by George Westinghouse, inventor and entrepreneur. The company was known for its inventions in electrical devices and products.

Bankruptcy will have a major impact on the bottom-line for thousands of Georgia Power customers. Not only the short-term costs, but the long-term effect for the rate-payers could be felt for generations.

Westinghouse is already \$3 billion over budget on the unfinished AP1000s at Plant Vogtle. We should not be forced to pay for Georgia Power's mistake. Maybe now is the time to throw in the towel on the construction of Vogtle 3 and 4 in Waynesboro, Georgia, and its twin VC Summer in Jenkinsville, South Carolina. This is just too hot for the rate-payers to handle.

We realize that filing bankruptcy is to protect one's bottom line. Toshiba Corporation, the 142-year-old conglomerate and parent company to Westinghouse, has already

warned it may not be able to continue as a supporter, because of the growing concern with billions of dollars in losses from its Westinghouse Electric nuclear business. Which puts them in jeopardy of having to file bankruptcy themselves. Everyone is concerned with their bottom-line.

However, in Georgia the rate payers' bottom-line is not protected, because the Georgia legislators in 2009 passed the Nuclear Energy Financing Act, with a percentage of the construction cost for Plant Vogtle being passed the rate-payers. South Carolina legislators passed a similar law called the Load Review Act. These laws laid the framework and opened the door to continual added increases of construction costs to their rate-payers.

Now that Westinghouse has thrown in the towel on construction, who will have to pick-up this cost? This puts the rate-payer at the mercy of the Public Service Commission, who has always been a supporter of the wishes of Southern Company, the owner-operator of Plant Vogtle.

There are many other resources

of renewable energy that can be used with a lower cost to produce. These resources would be cleaner and provide a healthier environment for future generations. This would also create a better fit for the rate payers to handle.

Let us not forget the daily struggles that these Environmental Justice Communities go through just to survive. We cannot afford to allow a bankrupt company to pass on the expense of these Bloodsucking Nuclear Plants to the rate payers, taking away the life-support from these Environmental Justice Communities.

It is the responsibility of our legislators to always protect the American citizens and Environmental Justice Communities from becoming the dumping grounds for bad investments. Therefore, let us stay vigilant to protect our future from wasteful spending and halt companies who rely on the Environmental Justices Communities to help pick up the tab. ■

Charles Utley, Environmental Justice Coordinator

## PIPELINE PUZZLES:

### North Carolinians cautiously applaud NC DEQ, while Virginians shake their heads in bewilderment.



By Sharon Ponton

The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) has rejected the Army Corps of Engineers blanket Nationwide Permit 12 as the permitting mechanism it will use to determine water quality permitting along the path of the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline. Instead, NCDEQ has committed to a thorough state water certification process to be completed under its authority under the Clean Water Act. The NCDEQ will protect its citizens and its water quality by review and individual stream, river and wetland crossings.

In Virginia, pipeline opponents, landowners and grassroots groups are shaking their heads in bewilderment, disdain and disgust. On April 6, 2017, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (VADEQ) announced it would complete a thorough review of all stream and wetland crossings under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act. Many opposing the pipeline cheered the decision and were pleasantly surprised the McAuliffe administration had succumbed to public pressure to represent the interests of the people and the environment over the corporations backing the proposed Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley pipelines. The Roanoke Times April 6<sup>th</sup> headline sharing the good news read: "DEQ to require pipeline projects to secure state water quality certification."<sup>1</sup> But the good news did not last long.

Little did the public, nor the journalists writing the stories, know that the next

day, April 7, James Golden, VADEQ's Director of Operations, the number two to VADEQ Administrator David Paylor, would send a letter to the Army Corps of Engineers effectively abdicating VADEQ's responsibility to protect Virginia's waters. The letter asked the federal agency to complete a Nationwide 12 blanket permitting process for both the proposed Mountain Valley and Atlantic Coast Pipelines.

Seven weeks later when journalists at the Roanoke Times and the Richmond Times Dispatch began asking pointed questions, VADEQ admitted the statement released by its Public Relations staff was incorrect. VADEQ never bothered to correct the misinformation even though Public Information Officer Bill Hayden had been concerned about mixed messages being given to the press. The Richmond Times Dispatch headline on May 24<sup>th</sup> read: "Virginia DEQ denies backpedaling on pipeline water-crossing permits." VADEQ's James Golden blamed the misrepresentations to the public on Public Relations staff member, Bill Hayden, saying, "The agency isn't backtracking. Rather, Hayden talked with reporters before he had been briefed by "technical" staff members at the DEQ, Golden said Wednesday."<sup>2</sup> However, emails obtained by the newspapers under Freedom of Information requests show Hayden had asked for clarification from Golden the morning of April 6. Golden didn't reply to that email. Hayden is quoted in a June 20<sup>th</sup> Richmond Times-Dispatch article as saying: "There was no reply to my email from James or Melanie, as they were both busy at a

conference....As I recall, it was several weeks before we discussed the issue again. ... It's hard to say whether a response to my question would have avoided the confusion. I do think it's possible."<sup>3</sup>

Another revelation emerged in an article in the Roanoke Times on June 23 with the blaring headline: "State official advises Dominion: Integrity of permitting process for Atlantic Coast Pipeline is 'non-negotiable.'" This letter, also received through Freedom of Information requests, was written by Secretary of Natural Resources Molly Ward on April 19. The letter states, "state agencies will not base their decisions on requests or suggestions from an applicant."<sup>4</sup> Governor McAuliffe withheld three email chains claiming a FOIA exemption which covers "working papers." The VA DEQ also withheld six email chains it exempted claiming "attorney/client privilege."

One final episode occurred June 28, when it was reported the contractor VADEQ hired for \$2.2 million to review the soil and erosion plans for the proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline is a Dominion contractor....so much for an open, honest, transparent process in Virginia.

We hope North Carolina will continue to represent the interests of its citizens and conduct a transparent process with its 401 water certification. Meanwhile, Virginians are putting the pressure on the Commonwealth to do the same. ■

<sup>1</sup> Duncan Adams, *Roanoke Times*, "DEQ to require pipeline projects to secure state water quality certification", April 6, 2017

<sup>2</sup> Robert Zullo & Graham Moomaw, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, "Virginia DEQ denies backpedaling on pipeline water-crossing permits" May 24, 2017

<sup>3</sup> Robert Zullo & Graham Moomaw, *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, "A very confused, inaccurate picture is being spread: Why did Virginia DEQ wait seven weeks to correct inaccurate pipeline statement?" June 20, 2017

<sup>4</sup> Duncan Adams, *Roanoke Times*, "State official advises Dominion: Integrity of permitting process for Atlantic Coast Pipeline is non-negotiable" June 23, 2017



# Our Way of Life is at Stake

*by JL Fogo, Preserve Floyd*

Throughout the history of the United States, we have struggled with shifting rule by the few toward freedom for the many. To more fully view our experiment in democracy, I want to address me and you, the everyday citizen. We must consider the big picture in order to really examine what we are facing today. We've been taught to respect our elected representatives and to trust in their wisdom. We've been convinced they are protecting our rights to live without fear of oppression and that our environment is safe with clean water, air, soil, and food. We assume that our representatives will protect all that is necessary for our survival as a people and as a nation.

There is a massive campaign by multi-national petrochemical industries to blindly exploit the resources that are under our feet. They've sent drilling equipment deeper and deeper, burrowing through our aquifers, through methane, hydrogen sulfide, and other gas pockets that have resulted in the formulation of very dangerous and toxic cocktails of water that are no longer safe to drink. They have poisoned the soil and rendered it toxic to our food.

The latest threats include the development and rampant expansion of a dangerous transport system for these petrochemicals. Namely,

pipelines. Pipelines of massive size are being built and planned—subjecting our environment to previously unimagined threats. Expansive contamination of our water resources is a reality. These pipelines leak, break, and even explode—causing previously unimagined harm to our environment and to people's lives.

Right here, right now, two of these massive 42-inch pipelines are being proposed. The Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) and the Atlantic Coast Pipeline (ACP) are intent on blasting and gouging their way through the mountains we cherish to transport fracked gas to sea ports for export. No local benefit, no local jobs, and absolutely no safety are to come of them. The only result would be massive profits gained by petrochemical industries in export sales and a permanently damaged, scarred and dangerous terrain that would hold tainted water beneath the much loved ground we walk upon today.

We must hold the people we send to political office accountable for their actions. We must accept our responsibilities to learn all the facts and analyze all the information possible and not simply take the “good word” of any candidate. We must hear their words with a skeptical ear and see their actions with a skeptical eye. We must be assured with ample evidence that they are working for our best interests.

So what can you and I, the everyday citizen, do? We are fortunate in our community of Floyd County to have a government that is truly willing to engage. We have ample opportunity to participate in a system designed to be a participatory democracy. Do you have concerns about what is happening on your home ground? Do you have ideas about improving our future? Engage. Local leadership must be open to public involvement. In order to accurately represent us they need to hear what we have to say. What can we do? We can show up. We can bring issues to the forefront. We can make suggestions and if necessary, demands. And we must. Our way of life—and the life of our planet upon which we depend and which we must defend—is at stake.

*About the author – J. L. Fogo has been active in community based non-profit organizations for over 20 years and is currently Co-Chair of Preserve Floyd, a grassroots organization focused on the environment, health, and safety of Floyd County and the Blue Ridge Mountains. ■*

# Is Injustice a Coincidence?

## Why Enviva Must Be Stopped

By Pastor Cary Rodgers



Is it coincidence that Richmond County residents in North Carolina have more asthma related emergency room visits than all the surrounding counties? Is it coincidence that cancer and

chronic lower respiratory diseases are their second and third leading causes of death according to Richmond County's Health Department latest community health assessment? \* Is it coincidence that Richmond County is home to heavy toxic pollution producing companies such as Duke Energy power plant who were recently given permission from the state to spew 3,514,000 lbs of Nitrogen Oxides; 7,148,000 lbs of Sulfur Dioxide; and 3,985,800 lbs of Carbon Monoxide per year? Is it coincidence that Duke Energy's power plant, Piedmont Natural Gas, Pee Dee Electric and other polluting companies like CSX rail company are located in Hamlet and Dobbins Heights who have a concentration of African Americans and high poverty rates?

The personal testimonies from many of the residents who have lived in the area for years are very tragic. It has been reported that many fathers and grandfathers who worked for CSX for years died from cancer in which many believe was due to the exposure of chemicals and pollutants from CSX. It is not uncommon to hear from the elders in the community who report that they personally know at least ten or more people who worked for CSX who died from cancer.

To add insult to injury, the Richmond county commissioners went "fishing" for another polluting producing company to dump in Dobbin Heights known as Enviva. Enviva is a D.C. based company that operates multiple wood pellet producing mills. The wood pellets from these mills are shipped to power plants in European countries to burn as fuel. What was Enviva's bait? \$1.6 million in direct cash incentives that comes directly from the Richmond County tax payers and property tax breaks of up to 85%. Plus, Enviva will receive European subsidies that will soon expire. What will Dobbins Heights receive in return? Of course the county politicians would say, "jobs, jobs, and jobs." The reality is that the jobs and economic impacts to the local community will be minuscule compared to the negative health and economic impacts of these wood pellet mills.

The production of these wood pellet mills create tons of particulate matter, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide, and nitrogen oxides that have been directly linked to asthma, chronic lower respiratory diseases, and cancer. Also, there is a dramatic increase of at least 200 heavy logging trucks per day and constant loud noises from the plant 24 hours a day. Property values of the local landowners around these mills plummet greatly. The local forests that store the carbon are stripped of their habitat, natural water purification systems and flood protection.

Is it coincidence that those who proposed to place Enviva's wood pellet in Dobbin Heights don't even live in Dobbin Heights? Why don't politicians who propose pollution producing industries put them in their own neighborhoods where their families live and play? Is this coincidence, too? Or is it a strategic design to make money at the expense of the health and quality of life of others? No, this is not coincidence nor "fake news," but reality. It is all by design to place in communities that are economically depressed and politically suppressed.

Many environmental justice impact studies have found that a great majority of toxic air and chemical polluting industries are disproportionately and strategically placed in low income and minority communities like Dobbin Heights. This is why we had to legislate civil rights and environmental justice laws, so many of these vulnerable communities would not become pollution dumping grounds. In fact, neither Enviva nor Richmond County has done an environmental justice impact statement of how its plant will directly impact Dobbins Heights and the surrounding communities. When asked about it they just gloss over the issue or try to assure the residents that they have their best interest at heart. ■



## Enviva pellet manufacturing facility in Ahoskie, NC.

Wood pellet manufacturing facilities like Enviva's are being placed throughout rural poor communities in the South. Enviva currently operates a wood pellet mill in Sampson County, NC. Jane, who lives less than a mile from the pellet mill in Sampson County, reports that her air quality test revealed a 75% increase of air pollution. Recently Enviva held a public meeting in Dobbin Heights to try to minimize and quiet the fears, questions, and concerns that the residents have about the pellet mill. But to their surprise residents who are directly impacted by the Enviva's plant in Sampson County drove over two hours to share their nightmare experience of increased pollution, noise, and truck traffic along with the lack of increase of jobs for local people. They pleaded with the Dobbin Heights community to do all

in their power to stop this nightmare, Enviva, from coming to their community.

Enviva deceptively markets itself as a green and renewable energy company. Common sense and science reveal there is nothing green about burning anything twenty four hours a day seven days a week. Studies have shown that the impact of burning wood pellets for power producing plants is no better than the pollution produced by coal and natural gas.

Concerned Citizens of Richmond County, a BREDL chapter, along with Dogwood Alliance, an environmental group based out of Asheville, NC have implemented several strategic actions to stop the proposed Enviva plant from ruining their community. In addition, with the approval of the BREDL

executive board, they have taken legal action to petition the state to rescind the current permit with the help of the Southern Environmental Law Center. Enviva must be stopped.

When it comes to environmental justice, nothing is by coincidence. This is why BREDL and its local grassroots chapters exist. We will continue to empower local communities to stop polluting industries which reap economic benefits for themselves at the expense of others. ■

\* Richmond County Health Assessment,  
<http://www.richmondnc.com/DocumentCenter/View/1509>

# Can We Ignore The Signs?

<http://www.chattanoogaapulse.com/columns/shades-of-green/can-we-ignore-the-signs/>

by *Sandy Kurtz*

*May 10, 2017*

Our intrepid environmental columnist attends the People's Climate March

"We've been given a warning by science, and a wake-up call by nature; it is up to us now to heed them." —Bill McKibben

Imagine yourself amidst a crowd of 200,000 people on a sweltering day marching on hot pavement in Washington D.C. Imagine this positive, energetic crowd bringing a message in unison to the center of U.S. governmental power: Listen! Listen, Government, listen to prevailing science about climate change! Take action with justice to save the life support system we need for our species to survive!

In fact, the People's Climate March was a real and powerful calling in unity for jobs, justice, and climate action. On April 29, 2017, I was there to witness it firsthand chanting along with others, "This is what democracy looks like!"

The whirlwind trip began Friday evening. My 12-year old granddaughter, a teen friend and I drove to Oak Ridge to catch one of the three Tennessee buses bound

for D.C. Arriving early in the morning, we caught the Metro and walked to the Capitol mall to experience a flurry of activity as people assembled. We filled Pennsylvania Avenue for 20 blocks marching to the White House on the 100th day of Trump's administration.

"We're here, we're hot, this planet's all we got," demonstrators chanted. After surrounding the White House, a sit-in took place. Marchers beat their chests to a drum rhythm symbolically indicating our hearts beat as one. A rally followed at the Washington Monument.

Meanwhile, more than 370 sister marches occurred in solidarity all over the world including Chattanooga where participants walked across the Walnut Street Bridge and back. Finally at 9:30 p.m., sweaty and exhausted, we returned to the bus for the overnight journey back home.

The event was well organized. Marchers went to locations based on their special concern. Pick your spot behind Guardians of the Future, Defenders of Truth, or Keepers of Faith. Those concerned

with immigration issues related to climate change impacts chose Creators of Sanctuary or Protectors of Justice. Builders of Democracy, Reshapers of Power, and Many Struggles: One Home were other choices.

Before marching we witnessed strong statements from indigenous women, labor leaders, veterans for peace, ministers, nurses, and environmentalists calling us to Resist, Build, Rise.

Everywhere there were signs, posters and flags being handed out in an electrified atmosphere. Lining the mall sidewalk was a long line of large water holders for refilling water bottles and another one of porta-potties. A realistic looking polar bear was hanging out with admirers and posing for pictures. Indigenous peoples were in colorful native dress. There was a biodiverse and multi-lingual mix of peoples, ages, genders, and colors. We saw large animal figures and imaginative headgear to visually enhance the message.





**Sandy Kurtz (front and center, with her granddaughter on right and teen friend on left), attended the Peoples Climate March in Washington DC.**

**Sandy is the BREDL Vice President for Tennessee and Alabama and one of the founders of BEST, the Bellefonte Efficiency & Sustainability Team, formed in 2008. Later the group added Mothers Against Tennessee River Radiation to its name (BEST/MATRR). Sandy wrote this article for her *Shades of Green* column in the *Chattanooga Pulse*.**

As the march began we stayed with the Defenders of Truth partly because they featured a small band of second-liners and a stiltwalker dancing to the lively music. This festive section supporting science was filled with creative signs.

"We are all on thin ice." "Alternative energy, not alternative facts" "No sides in climate" "Scientific truth decay" "Planet before Profit" "Denial is not a policy" "This is not a drill." "Break free from fossil fuels" "Climate change doesn't care if you believe in it," "It will be hard to apologize to your children when

you're underwater" "Make Earth cool again."

And non-stop chanting too: "Hey, Hey, Ho, Ho, fossil fuels have got to go." Suddenly as we walked the people began to shout "Shame, shame, shame". We were passing the Trump International Hotel. That chant was repeated as we surrounded the White House along with "Resistance is here to stay—welcome to your 100th day."

What an event! Many people look for signs from God or signs from animals or plants to help them make decisions. We have sent signs and

spoken truth to power both visually and with our bodies. Ironically, we did it on a day that set an all-time heat record during the warmest April on record in Washington D.C. That's another sign that we ignore climate change at our peril.

Let us keep pushing for awareness among us all because, as one sign stated, "Good planets are hard to find."

*Sandra Kurtz is an environmental community activist and is presently working through the Urban Century Institute. You can visit her website to learn more at [enviroedu.net](http://enviroedu.net) ■*

# WHERE IS MY COMMUNITY? WHERE? RIGHT HERE!

By Ann Rogers

As a chapter of BREDL, it is likely you are working hard every day to stop pollution or damage to the environment by some large-scale industrial project. Whatever it is you and your chapter members are fighting, whether an asphalt plant, nuclear power plant, pipeline, compressor station, interstate freeway, hazardous waste incinerator, landfill, nuclear waste dump, factory farm, power transmission line, or other environmentally destructive project, you are working to protect a specific place – *this place* – your beautiful, cherished home in the rural southeastern United States.

To prevail in your fight against the polluting project, you and your neighbors must work together. It can't be done by an individual or even two or three people working in isolation. To be really effective, it must involve the entire community. So how do you get in touch with all the people who might have an interest in supporting your work to protect this "at risk" place?

One answer is to use an online tool called Reference USA. Reference USA allows the user to generate contact lists containing mailing addresses and phone numbers for all the residents with phone service in areas that you define on a map. Sound like a good way to get in touch with all the people who live in the neighborhoods surrounding and potentially affected by a largescale polluting project? Ok, let's see how it works.

Your first task is to open Reference USA and navigate to the place in the program where you can create a map. To do that, you must first find a local or regional library that offers Reference USA on their website. The best way to do that is to call the library and ask for the reference department. The reference librarian can tell you how to use your library card number to log into the system and enter the Reference USA site from the library's website.

All right, you've gained access to

Reference USA from your local library's website. Now what? Here are the steps to generating your mailing/phone list for everyone within a defined radius of the site that you are working to protect:

- Click on "Click here to use ReferenceUSA"
- Accept terms and continue
- Enter your library card number
- Click "log on"
- Click "US Standard White Pages"
- Open "Advanced Search" tab
- Click on "Map Based Search"
- Click on "Open Map"
- Zoom to desired geographic starting point
- Scroll with directional arrows and + / - buttons in upper right corner of map. Clicking in the center of the blue circle allows for scrolling in smaller increments.
- Click button labeled "Draw Shape"
- Click with cursor to define polygon on the map. Double click when finished. Click inside shape to modify it, if necessary.
- A call-out message appears, containing the words "Shape.1" and the number of results. Click "include", then click "ok".
- Use the back arrow to go back to your map
- Create more shapes as needed, and "include" the records
- Click "DONE"; the map goes away
- Click "View results"
- Click "Save Search" button
- Click "sign in" (little green letters at top)
- Enter email address and password associated with your logon
- Click "sign in". It takes you back to the Results page.
- Select all the results on page 1 by clicking uppermost box. Select



"download". Select "Excel". Select your level of detail. Select "download records".

- A window appears offering to open or save your Excel file containing your records from page 1. Open it.
- Click back arrow. Go to page 2 of your records. Unclick previous selection. Repeat process to save records on page 2.
- Repeat for all subsequent pages of records
- You will have a separate Excel file for each page of records. You can cut and paste them into a single Excel file.

You will get lots of telephone numbers using this method. We used this method to call people to invite them to attend the very first public meeting of BREDL chapter, Preserve Roanoke. The meeting was held in Bent Mountain, VA in October, 2014. There were well over 100 people in attendance at that meeting – concerned neighbors packed the meeting room!

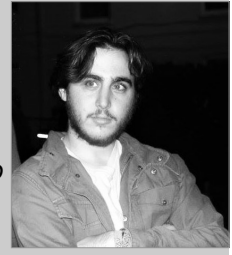
If your local library doesn't offer ReferenceUSA, contact the nearest regional library that offers library borrowing privileges in your community.

If you need technical assistance in using Reference USA, contact BREDL and we'd be glad to help! ■



# Self Care and Relationship Building in Organizing

By Michael James-Deramo



Our work is difficult. It isn't easy to stand up to massive corporate interests that want to put a pipeline through your land, or expose your community to a nuclear reactor, or build an asphalt plant or a hazardous waste incinerator. It isn't easy engaging with representatives who don't seem to want to listen to you or who receive money or other gifts from the industries which threaten your future. It can be tiring, draining, isolating, and heart wrenching work. But what we have is more powerful than their money or their influence. We have each other, and we have ourselves. Those are the things that we must protect the most in our work. Our power is based on our relationships and our identities. Money can distort the facts and spin stories in the media, but they cannot buy our stories and our experiences. Money cannot replicate the roots we have grown from within our communities.

Practicing self care and relationship building as organizers is often forgotten or put on the back burner. There are tasks that feel like they must be done now, by us alone. However, our work will not be effective if we are overwhelmed, burned out, and forgetting our mental health. Take time in your meetings to breath and check in with your neighbors. Schedule time for decompression or group appreciation. This might not feel productive, but it may be the difference between whether someone can continue or must step back from the work. It may be the difference between a strategic work product, and a rushed plan that amounts to wasted resources.

Some tactics for managing stress in organizing includes having icebreakers at the beginning of each meeting. Even if everyone knows one another, asking questions helps

people get to know one another, fosters friendships, and creates a more cohesive group. If you only see your fellow organizers when discussing stressful work you will associate that relationship with stress. Instead, encourage silliness or movement. Sing songs together, or pray with one another. Have exercises in which individuals voice their appreciation for others in the room and speak about their own victories, both within and outside of the work. Cultivate a space in which individuals can be vulnerable with one another and voice fears and concerns, then strive to validate them rather than look for immediate solution. Understand that emotional work is also work and maintaining structures of support and love of one another is productive. Furthermore, if you are someone who takes on a large amount of responsibility, ask for help and delegate tasks. Imagine how the group would function if you, or another member, suddenly left the group. If the group would be unable to function and suffer more than a period of setback, consider delegating more responsibility. Everyone has strengths they can bring to the group but often it takes empowerment and validation from those in the lead for newer members to feel comfortable stepping into a role.

So often organizing gets lost in the numbers. We often hear about a goal of this many people to this event to express this fact boiled down to this set of numbers. Individuals resonate deepest with stories, not numbers. We need facts to empower our organizing but we must not let data take precedent over our stories. Push your members to explore their personal stories and what led them to the campaign you are a part. What yearning for a future different than the one forecasted pushed them to

work for change? We have all felt yearning. How can this be expressed in a way that reminds others of when they have felt similar? Use multiple means of self-expression. Art, performance, song, and music have a direct role in portraying your story in a way reaches people on a different level, can capture media creatively, and also add a fun, therapeutic element to the work. Ask your members: what makes you feel powerful? Lean into that power in your work whether it is your ability to write and craft a narrative, tell a story through paint and song, or even be a source of mental support for others.

Spend time with what you are fighting for and use it to strengthen your conviction, and harden your resolve. Maybe it is the creek near your home, your mountainous view, or your children and grandchildren. Let your love for what holds meaning to you rebuild you when times become difficult. Practice loving openly, speaking it, showing it, and asking for it in return. Love those whose tactics are different from your own out of harmony over unity, and love those who stand with you as you put time and mental capacity into the struggles we've been given. The industry does not love. Do not let it's ideology of division bring you down. Grassroots community organizing is about more than just beating the opposition. It is about empowering each other, together. This work is difficult. It can be tiring, draining, isolating, and heart wrenching work. But I can't think of anything more beautiful and more powerful than standing arm in arm with our friends and neighbors and fighting for our communities and all we hold dear. And when the industry comes to our doorstep to say "it's over, it's a done deal. You can't stop us." We look them in the eyes and say "You're wrong." ■

BREDL  
PO BOX 88  
Glendale Springs  
NC 28629

**Contact BREDL to help organize your community and  
plan events to educate others about your issue and  
expand your membership so you can win!**

**BREDL** is a regional, community-based non-profit environmental organization founded in 1984. BREDL encourages government agencies and citizens to take responsibility for conserving and protecting our natural resources. BREDL advocates grassroots involvement in environmental issues. Protecting children's health from environmental poisons, empowering whole communities to engage in crucial decision making, and changing the balance of power to prevent injustice are key components of our work.

**Visit [www.bredl.org](http://www.bredl.org) to view our interactive timeline that spans  
30 years of environmental work across the southeast.  
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Thank you for supporting Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

It's easier than ever to **join**, **renew** and **donate** online.

Check out our secure online donation forms and use your credit card at **[www.BREDL.org](http://www.BREDL.org)**.

Or send your check to: BREDL PO Box 88 Glendale Springs, NC 28629

For more information contact BREDL at 336-982-2691.

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