



News of the Oaks by Valerie
Movement Support by Ollie
Coldvember by Jane
State of the Commune by Valerie

News of the Oaks by Valerie

We're continuing to have a rise in membership, and with around 75 members there's a lot going on.

Celebrations New member Ollie has been hosting "Gay Bar" parties, giving us all a chance to dance and show off our fabulous outfits • We celebrated Steve's 80th birthday—he is a huge Grateful Dead fan and we had our in-house Grateful Dead cover band play for the evening, and looked at photos of Steve's long life • We do not celebrate Thanksgiving here; instead we observe the National Day of Mourning with an afternoon of videos by and about Indigenous people, with discussion. We held our Gratitude Feast later in November and hosted many friends and ex-members for the dinner, which included the ever-popular "Ping-Pong Table of Desserts" • We had our yearly "Art Walk", in which members display various art they have been creating, and we have a walking tour through the community to admire peoples' creations.

Farm Life New member Raen has been making good use of our greens by making pestos using our home-grown basil, spinach, cress and tat soi (an Asian green similar to bok choy), and we have been enjoying this nutritious and delicious treat • We've also had 2 new baby calves born, adding to the herd we keep for dairy/meat purposes.

Movement We have been offering a multitude of movement classes lately. We're currently having regular Capoeira, Aikido, and Yoga, as well as a Ballet class for some of the kids here • And in a different type of movement, we recently instituted a Racial Justice Orientation session as part of our Visitor Program, as a way of moving ourselves along the path of becoming an anti-racist community.



Gratitude feast dessert table



Raen makes pesto



Day of Mourning poster



One display for Art Walk 2023

Movement Support: Political Activism by Ollie

New member Ollie has become manager of Movement Support which is one of the more unusual areas through which Twin Oakers can get labor credits. While most labor areas are for activities that benefit the community directly (garden, the Seed Racks business, etc.) Movement Support is designed to give labor credits and money to members who do work outside the community to support causes we believe in. Historically this has included many things ranging from protests and direct action to collecting acorns for the Virginia Department of Forestry Nursery to support future tree planting and much more.

Recently, after a period with no manager of the area and not much being done, new member Ollie has become manager and several people have started doing more activities being funded by Movement Support.

Locally, several Twin Oakers and folks from other communities in Louisa county have started a Louisa chapter of Food Not Bombs. This national organization is an all-volunteer movement that recovers food that would otherwise be discarded, and shares free vegan and vegetarian meals with the hungry in over 1,000 cities in 65 countries in protest to war, poverty, and destruction of the environment, and we have, for about two months, been distributing food for free in downtown Louisa every Sunday from 1-2 pm. When Ollie mentioned this to long-term member Steve he mentioned that Oakers used to bring food to the Richmond Food not Bombs for several years decades ago.

A little further afield, in the past several months, Movement support has provided labor credits and travel costs for Twin Oakers to travel to Washington, DC to attend protests in support of a cease-fire in Gaza. Just last week we filled up our 15 person van with Oakers attending the January 13th protest.



Food Not Bombs, Louisa VA

Further afield still, Oakers traveled recently to be part of the movement against the Mountain Valley Pipeline in West Virginia.

Ollie is very excited to be the new manager of this cool area and is really looking forward to helping Oakers out of our little bubble to engage with the world beyond the farm in meaningful ways and to keep fighting oppression everywhere. We're always looking for new ways for Oakers to participate in movements off the farm, so if you're organizing in the area and need some friendly communards to help, feel free to contact us!

Coldvember by Jane

A few months ago, I was reminiscing on my travels abroad, and remembered one particularly adventurous morning, when I jumped into Galway Bay in Ireland. Dubbed “Coldvember” by the university students there, masses of them jump into the churning ocean waters. I joined in one day, and seeing the pictures made me want to recapture some of that joy and bravery.



Author, Jane, on left, and other brave swimmers

I put up a note up saying I would be jumping into the pond every morning in November, save Sundays. Most people thought I was crazy, but sure enough, 3 other brave souls joined me that chilly first morning! Overtime, our numbers grew, and on November 8th we had a whopping 9 people in the pond that day. We have shrunk a bit since then, to a core group of 4 or 5.

The shock of entering the water is instant—some of us like to work our way in slowly, but I find the only way I’m getting in is by sprinting in screaming. I’ve been told we are audible from the courtyard, with one co thinking a chicken slaughter was underway! On the first few days we ran in and out, but recently we’ve stayed in as long as 6 minutes. After about 4 minutes I

find my body starts to feel warm, and by the time I exit I'm actually quite comfortable. Getting dressed again is probably the hardest part- the teeth chattering and shaking hands makes it difficult to dry off quickly.

So, what's the purpose of this craziness? Cold plunges have been shown to improve heart rate and circulation, as well as provide some benefit for mental health. It also helps your body acclimate to the cold- I have found I can now walk around easily with a thin winter coat and gloves, whereas I used to struggle to keep myself warm with tons of layers. Other co's have noted feeling more awake afterwards, and needing less coffee or other substances throughout the day.

As of writing this, we have three more plunges left. Part of me will miss it- the camaraderie of the group, the feeling of accomplishment every morning, and the clarity of mind that comes with it. Some of us are thinking of continuing the challenge and have dubbed it "Coldcember". It's turned into something of a Twin Oaks trend, with co's who would never dare of jumping in following our progress. Regardless of whether we continue this challenge into December or not, it will certainly be remembered!

There are definitely some people who would NOT benefit from cold plunges- the very young or very old, and folks with heart conditions. Check with your doctor and do research before trying it out!

State of the Commune by Valerie

Twin Oaks is always a reflection of the mainstream to some extent. What is happening "out there" also happens here. Right now, in the world and in this country, many long-term entities that are somewhat cooperation-based are struggling (e.g. US postal service, western democracy) and we are no different. Polarization is more of a cultural force than it has been, creating greater divisiveness and demonization / othering in this country, the wider world, and also at Twin Oaks. Mainstream culture itself is undergoing many changes. We are definitely experiencing the effects of those cultural impacts.

We've had a number of challenges in the community in the last several years, and we are continuing to feel the effects. When the Covid pandemic hit, by coincidence we were at low-ish population, and we in ways became like a "medieval plague village" and had no visitors and limited contact with the outside world for some months. We are still recovering from that low population. Somewhat connected to that, as well as the above-mentioned cultural change reasons, our decision-making and organizational/administrative structures are not as robust as they have been. (fewer experienced members to join administrative teams, our collective town trips happening less frequently, etc.) Each of our main community businesses are having their own particular challenges and that is affecting our financial situation. Our infrastructure is aging and we have found mold in many of our buildings. There is some tension around how we are moving forward dealing with that mold, partly related to difficulties in our various income areas and community businesses.

The dynamic between newer, younger members and longer-term, older members has always existed to some extent, but related to the aforementioned greater polarization overall, this has become more pronounced here in the last couple of years. A number of other long-term, established communities are reporting similar challenges and changes, and unfortunately,

some of them have ceased to function as they have been, and these beacons and models of alternative culture have been lost.

The good news is we have a great group of current new members—there are a quite a few of them and they are bringing good energy and ideas to the community, so that is a strong support for us. We also have the steadiness and experience of our committed, long-term members. Our population is slowly rising again.

Also, one potential advantage of this time of less solid structure is that we would like to change some aspects of our culture to become more anti-racist and inclusive. That is easier to do when there is already some “give,” rather than an iron-clad adherence to “how it’s always been.”

Our focus during this era of our history is to find ways to maintain and strengthen the parts of Twin Oaks that make us a unique alternative cultural reality, while making changes and responding to cultural changes, current challenges and the needs/wants of current members.

¡La lucha continua!

Twin Oaks on Social Media

<https://www.facebook.com/TwinOaksCommunity>

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