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News of the Oaks

by Valerie

Our biggest news is that after a few years of low population, we are about to hit Pop Cap (our maximum population). If/when that happens, we'll still be hosting our Visitor Program as per usual, but it may take a little longer for accepted Visitors to return.



Celebrations: Our two big events recently were our annual Anniversary, with ex-members returning to help us celebrate Twin Oaks' 57th year of existence; and also we hosted the wedding of community friends Ken and Irena, with a gathering including "Ken and Irena Jeopardy" and Ken's brother who is an Episcopal priest officiating.

Sustainability: We've been busy with various projects. Our "eco-residence" that has 10 bedrooms, 2 living rooms and 1 bathroom off-grid, got an upgrade of new solar panels. Ex-member Debbie, now living at neighboring community [Living Energy Farm](#) (LEF) helped install them.

We had several members take a literal field trip, to help harvest sweet potato slips at a farm we are connected with a couple of hours away. They were working with our sister community Acorn's business [Southern Exposure Seed Exchange](#) and [Ujamaa](#), a BIPOC-led organization that works to bridge the gap between prospective BIPOC seed growers and seed companies.

Summer Activities for Kids and their Kid-like friends:

The "Twin Oaks Swim Team" is a group of kids and adults here who are dedicated to swimming in the pond every day! It's a rotating cast of characters but has included Finley, Jessie, Nick, Indigo and Dave. Go team! Also a number of Twin Oaks kids are attending Shiloh Quaker Summer Camp an hour or two away from us. This year, several adults will also be participating in the camp as staff/support.

Second Edition: our member Pam Dawling, who has written two definitive books on farming/garden, has been hard at work on the second edition of her first book "[Sustainable Market Farming](#)".

Fire Recovery by Jason

This March, a wildfire swept through parts of the community and destroyed our conference site, warehouse, sawmill, machinery, hammocks inventory and many other items vital to the economic self-sufficiency of the community.

In the aftermath of the fire, we made the call to shut down the Hammocks business. With margins already thin in order to compete with overseas producers, and the loss of specialized equipment, making significant investments towards rebuilding seemed unlikely. We'll finish up some



hammocks using supplies which were off-site before the shop is converted into space for our Seed Racks business.

This is a blow to the community in both an economic and emotional sense. While the days of hammocks being our main source of income are long gone, the business sustained the community for many years, providing work and creating a much loved product that made a name for ourselves.

While it is hard to say goodbye to this era of Twin Oaks, we are also looking at our community economy going forward. The Process Team kick-started a “CommEcon” process, in which members submit proposals for new business ideas that the community could use to generate income. We will spend the summer deliberating proposals, and decisions about where to allocate resources will likely happen towards the end of the year.

Proposals include a pottery business, renewing our hammock-chair production, (but not regular hammocks), sewing textile goods, online teaching, tech support for local businesses, video game creation, building an eco AirBnB, and the expanding of the relationship between Twin Oaks and Common Wealth Seed Growers, a seed company run by one of our members with a focus on plant breeding and resilience in our seed systems. (See other article here for more info on Common Wealth Seed Growers.)

While we have not been able to start the cleanup efforts at EC yet due to the need for fire investigations, we have been able to start the cleanup and rebuilding of our conference site. A group of communards from our sister communities in Missouri will come to help, and we are hopeful that this work can progress quickly. We are planning on hosting a full slate of conferences this year, including the Communities Conference, Women’s Gathering, and Queer Gathering. (see links elsewhere in this issue for more info)

The forest is likewise beginning its process of recovery. The fire was quick burning, passing through areas quickly and consuming leaf litter, but not catching the trees. Many large trees show some charring around their base, but it appears that they will survive. Many of the smaller saplings did not leaf out, leaving an empty and brown under-story, which contrasts with the untouched canopy, and the forest floor which is vigorously sprouting new life.



Ex-member Alexis-LEF was a firefighter and has been helping us prepare for another disaster. He installed the fire hose hookups near our residences some 30 years ago, which were instrumental in saving Tupelo. Since the fire, he has hosted a tour of our firefighting infrastructure, gotten us more firehose to place around the community, transformed our old tofu wastewater truck into a firetruck, and is advising us on forming our own fire brigade that can respond to fires on the property and direct the local firefighters on how to assist us.

Common Wealth Seed Growers by Zoe

While Edmund is one of the most renowned farmers at Twin Oaks, he rarely works in the main food garden. Rather, he manages several fields off the farm. He is part of Common Wealth Seed Growers, a cooperative project that produces and sells regionally-adapted, open-pollinated seeds. They only sell what grows well on their farms in Virginia, Tennessee and North Carolina. Common Wealth Seed Growers also use an open source seed promise for some of the seed varieties they've developed and their derivatives which promise to not restrict others' use of the seeds they've developed or



any of their derivatives to help combat corporate monopolization of seed varieties.

Edmund began breeding new produce variations back in 2011. Only three years later, Common Wealth Seed Growers received a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education grant to identify downy mildew resistant strains in cucumber, melon and winter squash. They also received grants from the Organic Farming Research Foundation in 2018 and 2019 for similar research.

Edmund manages seed production as an income area for Twin Oaks. He sells seeds produced by Common Wealth Seed Growers, Southern Exposure Seed Exchange and other seed companies. Edmund envisions Common Wealth Seed Growers expanding in the future, and employing many more Twin Oaks members. As it is, Edmund does enlist a few Oakers in the process. Seed saving includes planting, nurturing, harvesting, cleaning, packing, and shipping - all of which are labor intensive. Thankfully, many here enjoy such work. Arguably, the most notable of these tasks is harvesting seed from squash and gourds - something that is best done by hand, and is always messy. Common Wealth Seed Growers pays Twin Oaks by the hour as 'outside work' for tasks done by members that aren't directly agricultural such as marketing, website, and inventory management.

In addition to providing money, seed production and research, the work provides an abundance of organic food for the community including cucumbers, bell peppers, cantaloupe and winter squash. This has allowed the community to dine on varieties we have never had before, such as the Guatemalan Green Ayote squash that has forest green innards and a sweet flavor. Visit commonwealthseeds.com to view or request their 2024 product catalog by mail and find out more information about their mission.

Conference Announcements

Twin Oaks Queer Gathering Friday August 2 - Sunday August 4

A weekend of queertranstastic fun, learning, workshops, networking, revelry, and more!

<https://twinoaksqueergathering.org>

Twin Oaks Women's Gathering Friday August 16 - Sunday August 18

An inclusive gathering of women celebrating ourselves in the woods.

<https://womensgathering.org>

Twin Oaks Communities Conference Friday August 30 - Monday September 2
(Labor Day Weekend)

If you live or want to live according to the values of cooperation and sustainability, this conference is for you. The conference focuses on intentional communities and on the larger cooperative movement.

<https://communitiesconference.org>

