

VASUDHA

Fall 2014 Newsletter

Fall 2014 was a great start to Vasudha's year. The program hosted and participated in several exciting events on campus, helping to facilitate student learning across campus and in the larger community. Among those events students participated in and led were: a trip to the People's Climate March in New York City, a local Thanksgiving Dinner and the *Guswenta* film/speakers.

Annual Fall Picnic

In the declining heat of summer, this wonderful annual event took place outside on the Nason patio. The garden appeared to have taken its own course over the summer break as the shallots and garlic cloves planted last late fall by former residents had not been harvested. Newly moved in residents were introduced to the Program Director, Professor Michael Mascarenhas, had a chance to talk with Vasudha alumni, and got to fill their stomachs with freshly made smoothies.

Farmer's Market

In late August the new Vasudha residents were led by Laura Rabinow, Vasudha's Program Coordinator, to the Troy Farmer's Market. As it was the first trip to the market for most of the residents, they were greeted by Abby Lublin from Troy Zero Waste who

spoke about the history of the market and its role(s) in the Troy community.



Pictured: Kino Fan, Erica Ulhere, and Andres Zorelli

People's Climate March in NYC

In preparation for the People's Climate March, Vasudha hosted t-shirt screen-printing and banner making on the Union Patio. Students left their painted handprints and signatures on the banners. They also painted their thoughts about climate change and why it is an important social, political

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and ecological issue. The two completed banners were then carried by those students who participated in the march on September 22nd.



In total, 50 people went from RPI and walked with the roughly 410,000 other marchers for over four miles in what has been estimated as the largest

public action pertaining to climate change ever recorded.

The most memorable part for a number of students was the collective "moment of silence" held for all those most directly affected by issues of



climate change. The silence was followed by a rolling sounding of the alarm (yelling, bell ringing, horn blowing) to 'sound the alarm' for action by the United Nations Climate Summit.



Photo By: Andres Zorelli

Elizabeth Anderson, a Vasudha Alumni who participated in the march, reflected on the moment. Noting that:

The crowd was absolutely amazing, especially during and after the moment of silence. I saw people from all walks of life, carrying all sorts of signs and showing the breadth of environmentalism in the US and the world today.

Speakers & Films

Vasudha was thrilled to welcome back Andy Mager, Denise Watso and Kay Olan who all spoke after showing the film *Gueswenta*. The film centers on a social action in the summer of 2013, 400 years after the Two Row Wampum Treaty was first signed by New York's first peoples and

Dutch Settlers. The action involved members of the Onondaga Nation who - along with members of other first nations and those in solidarity with them - paddled down the Hudson for 28 days from Albany to the United Nations in New York City.

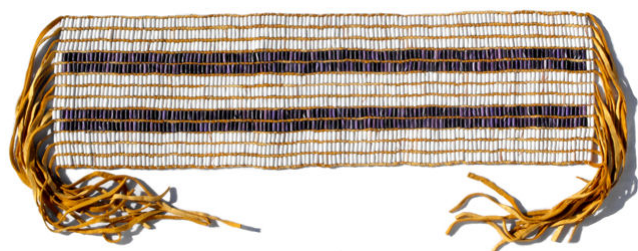


Image Courtesy of wampumchronicles.com

The Film was followed by a wonderful discussion about the treaty and its importance to current relationships between Indigenous Peoples and white settler states like the United States, especially in regard to their shared ecological and social systems. The talk was well attended by students and people from the broader community who listened, shared their thoughts, and enjoyed great food together.

Films

October 11th, 2014 was the [Global Frackdown](#), an event to bring awareness to the hazards of hydraulic fracturing. It aims to bring attention to the issue of where we get our energy from. Vasudha hosted a screening of *Gasland* and had a public discussion about the effects of fracking in our own communities. Residents also discussed the NY State Executive's [then] pending

decision with regard to allowing or not allowing fracking activity in the state.

The *Miyazaki Film Night of Horror* was a 2-film feature hosted by the students in the Nature & Society class around Halloween. The students screened Howl's moving Castle and Princess Mononoke. This was a casual event organized by and for students - after its success more movie nights are anticipated during the spring semester!

Thanksgiving Dinner

Another wonderful student led activity coalesced around the Thanksgiving holiday. In an effort to bring the community together before the end of the term Vasudha hosted a Thanksgiving Dinner in the Nason Classroom, opening it up to the wider environmental community on campus.



The dinner also served as a reunion of sorts and attempted to bridge the gap between current and former Vasudha residents. In the spirit of sustainability, the planners encouraged attendees to bring their own drinking vessels and utensils in order to reduce the amount of plastic waste

usually produced at campus functions. A large amount of students were involved in food prep, decoration, and serving. Overall it was a huge success - 45 people were anticipated to attend and over 70 ended up participating! We hope to make this a Vasudha tradition in years to come.

Class Projects

Vasudha's fall semester class, Nature & Society, provided a wonderful opportunity for residents/classmates to learn together and implement community service-learning projects. The class was split into 6 different groups, that were paired with local organizations like: the Produce Project at Capital Roots, Soul Fire Farm, the Solar Sal Boat project, Engineers for a Sustainable World, Engineers Without Borders, and Troy Bike Rescue.

Student Caleb Mwiko Mutithi reported that those students at Soul Fire Farm participated in two skill-share events, learned a lot about how the farm operates and "had the chance to interact with some members of the community which was fun!" Amanda Harold also noted that students who worked on the Solar Sal Boat "experienced first hand the design and numerous applications of solar power [...] we learned how we don't necessarily need non-renewable energy sources for all modes of transportation."



Those students working with ESW also engaged in interesting work, conducting research about international "aid" projects. Through this research students considered issues like: language barriers, cultural differences, and international trade disparities. Harwant Sethi noted of this project that all of these considerations then went into the planning of a solar charging station that the organization was designing in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Attended Oakwood Community Dinner

On the second Monday of each month, the Oakwood Soul Cafe, a wholesome dinner made by volunteers for Troy residents, is hosted by the Oakwood Community at 10th and Hoosick St. Vasudha residents went for their first dinner on October 13th. The residents look forward to planning a co-hosted meal with the Oakwood Community this coming April.

