

This Year's

Jim Embry greens up the Bluegrass

Model



Words on the page never seem to do justice to Embry. Ben Perry, director of Appalachia—Science in the Public Interest (2001-2005), recalls, “when I began organizing the Bluegrass Energy & Green Living Expo, my work became more Lexington-centric and the name Jim Embry started coming up on a regular basis. People kept telling me about this guy who was creating neighborhood gardens on the north end and that I should contact him. As we began exchanging emails, I pictured a laid-back, pony-tailed hippie with a green thumb and a passion for the environment. Then I met Jim.”

And he was surprised, explaining “Well the green thumb and passion part were true enough, but the rest

Rick Gersony, director of GreenLex.org, begins by counting down a partial list of Embry’s contributions to the community, “Jim’s projects include helping create the Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden (Recently selected by the Knight Foundation and LFUCG as a Key “Gateway” for the Bike trail from the Horse park to Downtown Lexington.) He is a Key member of the Bluegrass Partnership for Green Community steering committee that includes representatives of UK, LFUCG and Fayette School system. He also is a key organizer for Winburn Neighborhood Art Garden; Sustainable Communities Network; Youth Green Corps; NorthEast Lexington Initiative; 2010 rain gardens; Green design workshops; Green map systems, School Gardens, Recycling & Composting, Making the Farm/School

He is a true friend to the bluegrass of today and more importantly to the Bluegrass of the future and we are lucky he makes this part of the world his home.

—Rick Gersony, director, GreenLex.org



was a little off. I was not prepared for the dynamo of an environmentalist/community organizer who is as steeped in philosophy as he is in composting. His skin was also a shade or two darker than I had imagined and he has more ‘pony tails’ than you can shake a stick at!”

Perry says, “Jim has found a way to channel the fire from the center of the earth and bring it to bear in his daily work. He is motivated by the vision of a just, sustainable and ‘truly’ prosperous world and if you spend any time around him, he’ll share it with you. When others get bogged down in the dirty details, you can count on Jim to share his vision of the big picture and what the daily struggle is all about.”

Connection, Healthy lunches-local food; Seminar for faith leaders; Green school design and more! Jim also collaborates with the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, Russell Cave Elementary School, Community Action Council, Dunbar Memorial Garden, Art Miles Project and other local and national organizations.”

Gersony adds, “His optimism is infectious and his heartfelt commitment to human life and environment is expressed in his beautiful Fine Art, Poetry, his kind personality and is seen in the mind-boggling amount of wonderful projects he is involved in that are part of the green transformation of Lexington day by day.”

“I have learned from his elegant words and his actions that sustainable solutions to our environments problems must

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—Ben Perry, coordinator Bluegrass Energy and Green Living Expo

involve many types of community engagement as well as political and technology changes. He is a true friend to the bluegrass of today and more importantly to the Bluegrass of the future and we are lucky he makes this part of the world his home."

When Jim Embry won Good Foods' "Cooperate for Community!" contest to honor local community members for their work in sustainable foods earlier this fall, they said at the time, "Jim has exemplified his ability to cross barriers of age, race, and culture by establishing working relationships with youth to senior citizens, African American and Latino populations, uniting diversity with a common ground of food and gardening. With love for the community, Jim accomplishes sustainability and diversity through grants, private donations, collaborative efforts and volunteerism which motivates him by the

synergy of people working together creatively and cooperatively to improve their own lives, as well as the vitality of their community by establishing common bonds and mutual gain."

Sue Weant, who works toward sustainable family farming, says "Jim Embry is an ideal Model. His work toward a greener community are surely a benefit for all of us and I am happy to see someone share what he does [with] all the citizens of Lexington."

Bruce Burris is happy and honored to pass the baton of "This Year's Model" (he was selected this time last year in the issue headlined "Bruce Almighty") to Jim Embry, even if it does (technically) mean that now makes Burris "last year's model." Burris is a tough act to follow — having used his power for good and not evil all year long — now it's time to pass the torch.

Burris, an artist in a unique position to know, is candid about the fact that life as an advocate/activist is not an especially easy one in the bluegrass.

"I believe that having a voice as an average citizen or community advocate in Lexington is a very difficult thing—moreso than in most places—this despite what our leaders and professional boosters in the business/political/cultural communities would like us to believe."

"What impresses me most about Jim is how gracious he remains and in particular how he manages to move so seamlessly between the incredibly varied array of groups and constituents he necessarily interacts with. What he has accomplished in the last few years is really staggering and yet with Jim I get no sense of an ego needing to be massaged; he is truly dedicated to service and to creating the sort of community which works for all of us." ■

Knight Foundation Legacy Award

When the Knight Foundation selected a Jim Embry project as part of the \$2.5 million 2010 Legacy awards, it came as no surprise to Ace readers, where the local activist/advocate is already a long-time familiar face, as both a story subject and a byline.

Embry is the chair of the proposed Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden, which was included as

part of revitalizing the Third Street Corridor.

In response to the announcement of the award, Embry told the *Herald-Leader*, "It was not just where Isaac Murphy lived, but the racetrack was there...Over the last 40 years, that community has lost its vitality, its businesses, schools, part of its heart and soul." And he spoke a central truth that all of Lexington needs to take to heart when he said, "If the city is to be vibrant, then the entire city has to be that way, not just segments." ■

The Great Turning

Jim Embry's Diary in 2007

Editor's Note: Every year, Ace selects an individual to highlight as "This Year's Model"—a model citizen who typifies what Ace stands for—Active, Committed, Engaged (in the environment, the culture, the community, and so on). The Award is meant to be a surprise, but we did ask this year's Honoree, Jim Embry, to share a few words with the Ace readers about how he'd spent 2007. What follows is an excerpt.

Our beautiful city of Lexington is interwoven into a global quilt...some call it a global movement...that interconnects us with our earth community as we move towards creating a more sustainable human culture. This sustainability movement has been characterized most recently by the work of two Nobel Prize winners, Wangari Mathai from Kenya with the Green Belt Movement and Al Gore with his award-winning movie, *The Inconvenient Truth*. These two agents of change are among thousands of community and business leaders who are inspiring and organizing millions of people to get involved in this paradigm shift that some call The Great Turning...and others The Great Work. Thomas Berry and Joanna Macy say "our great work is to support a new pattern of human presence on the planet."

All around the world within this Great Turning, vortexes of change are spinning earthwise with renewed wisdom towards a more sustainable future. There are many vortexes of change present in Lexington and this year I have had the divine pleasure to have been actively involved in many of these local spinnings of this quilt. My efforts have been to find ways to connect the dots...to integrate the efforts...to help create local synergy...of the various government, business, education, religious, and community efforts. I realize that an integrated systems approach is THE way of thinking that we need as a guide for this work of creating a sustainable future.

As 2007 comes to a close I take a look back at the pieces of quilt that I have been fortunate to touch. My efforts have been channeled primarily through the Northeast Lexington Initiative and the Sustainable Communities Network.

This year the Northeast Lexington Initiative (NELI) worked primarily in three areas: 1) organizing the Youth GreenCorps, 2) collaborating with Leadership Lexington on developing the Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden and 3) supporting neighborhood associations.

The Youth GreenCorps which is a grassroots effort to transform lives and landscapes was organized as a way to involve youth directly in transforming their communities' landscape while their lives were

also being positively affected. The YGC began meeting inside in February every two weeks on Saturday mornings with practical indoor activities such as constructing bird houses and bird feeders from recycled material, constructing and painting raised beds, painting and distributing garbage cans, participating in design charettes for the Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden. When the weather turned warm our work moved outside and included cosponsoring Trash Cantina on Earth Day at Woodland Park with Green Thumb and TERRA, establishing the Nelson Avenue Art Garden and participating in the Health Fair at Lexington Traditional Magnet School.

Youth GreenCorps Summer 2007: in collaboration with the Mayor's Summer Youth Employment Program and Partners for Youth, YGC was led by five young men and one young woman (all teens) who worked all summer at various work sites. In and around Third Street Stuff on N. Lime the YGC planted trees and flowers, created art sculptures from recycled wood, constructed a straw bale bench, worked with youth from the Living Arts and Science Center, cleaned the patio at LTMS, planted perennials at Saint James Apartments, harvested vegetables at The Rock/La Roca Methodist Church garden behind Arlington School, supported the Nelson Avenue Art Garden, cleaned gravestones and learned the history of Cove Haven Cemetery, interacted with 70 children at the Westend Community Empowerment Project (WECEP) to construct a turtle from straw bale and to plant vegetable and flower gardens, provided paint and rain barrels for the Hill n' Dale Park naming ceremony and organized the Lexington Community Garden Tour. The garden tour held on August 2 included stops at Third Street Stuff, The Rock/La Roca Methodist Church garden, the Nelson Avenue Art Garden, the WECEP turtle and garden projects, the gardens at Ballard Place and the Senior Citizens Center.

This Fall the YGC collaborated with Russell Cave Elementary School and Community Action Council to establish a community art garden in the Winburn neighborhood. The Winburn Art Garden involves 30 plus youth and adults transforming an empty lot to a colorful, fun and edible landscape that will include murals and art from found objects, perennial flower gardens and rain gardens, vegetables, berries and fruit trees as well as benches and tables made from straw bale construction. We also collaborated with Booker T. Washington Elementary School to establish a school garden in which students were able in November to harvest and eat greens, lettuce and radishes. Some children had never before planted nor eaten anything out of their own garden! With a kind donation we were able to plant over 100 flower bulbs in front of the school. This spring daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, crocuses, irises and alliums will serve as a beautiful entrance into the school.

The Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden (IMMAG), a half-acre of vacant land at the intersection of Midland Place, Nelson Avenue and Third Street, is a community collaboration with NELI and Leadership Lexington aimed at commemorating the lives, stories and contributions of African-American horse industry members from Lexington's East End neighborhood. Plans for the area include transforming the land into a teaching art garden, with native plants and trees, horse-themed art from recycled material, historical markers, rain gardens and a home to small community theater productions. The art aspect put us in touch with the deeper essence of who we are as human beings...that is the need to be creative. And the garden aspect provides us the opportunity to experience our sacred connectedness to the earth. IMMAG has been included as part of the Legacy Projects funded by the Knight Foundation in preparation for the World Equestrian Games.

NELI attends the meeting and supports the work of the William Wells Brown, North Limestone and Martin Luther King neighborhood associations. The garbage cans painted by the Youth GreenCorps were distributed to these neighborhood associations.

My work in Sustainable Communities Network(SCN) brought me into contact with many other pieces of this quilt. SCN organized on **Feb 28** a Green Sanctuary seminar in conjunction with the Unitarian Universalist Church held at Good Foods. This movement to create sustainable communities provides the opportunities for faith-based institutions to transform interior sanctuaries into energy efficient and environmentally healthy buildings and exterior sanctuaries into **Gardens of Eating** and natural habitats.

March 13 - 14 I represented SCN at the "Growing Kentucky II: Land, Food and Culture—Creating Sustainability Where You Live" symposium held at UK. This gathering represented a one creative synergy between UK's College of Agriculture and College of Fine Arts explored opportunities for Kentuckians to develop more sustainable food systems. The conference featured Kentucky authors Bobbie Ann Mason and Wendell Berry, garden designer Jon Carloftis and Professor Marion Nestle of New York University who is the author of several books including Food Politics and What to Eat. In her presentation, Marion addressed national food systems, food equity and health problems especially in communities of color. However Scott Smith, dean of UK's College of Agriculture and his conference organizers for some reason could not find any people of color to serve as conference speakers or performing artists and there were only two or three of us in the audience. However the University proclaims that diversity is a priority!

On **March 30** I was a panel member at the "Lexington, the

Bluegrass and the Future of Planning: Beyond Adversarialism, Towards a New Paradigm" conference held at the Kentucky Horse



Jim Embry, featured in the "Until the Violence Stops" billboard



The garden tour stopping at the Nelson Avenue Art Garden. Jim Embry and Rakim Baker presented to the tour participants



The Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden

Park and sponsored by Center for Sustainable Cities. Ian Smith from Vancouver, B.C. in giving the keynote address described an exemplary model of city planning where sustainability principles are the guiding tools. I was disappointed at the lack of diversity at this event as well. This lack of diversity was prevalent throughout the year in so many conferences and events.

During **April Earthdays in Bluegrass** events offered an entire month of speakers, films, seminars, and hands on projects educating and promoting sustainable living ideas and practices.

SCN conducted a workshop on "the Philosophy and Practice of Sustainability" at the Peace and Global Citizenship Fair held on **May 19** at BCTC Cooper Drive campus which featured Kentucky foods, music, art, children's activities, dance and other workshops on sustainability.

Devorah Brous, Founder and Director of BUSTAN in Israel/Palestine, was on tour this summer and SCN was fortunate to get her for few days in Lexington. BUSTAN is a partnership of Jewish and Arab eco-builders, architects, academics, and farmers promoting social and environmental justice in Israel/Palestine using the principles of permaculture and non-violent direct action across ethnic divides. While in Lexington **June 4 - 6**, Devorah provided a closer look at the sustainability issues in Israel/Palestine during presentations at Temple Adath Israel and the Downtown Arts Center. The Arts Center evening also featured visual art, Rumi and slam poetry, breakdancing, jazz music and singing. It was such a grand evening of informing words and inspiring cultural expressions.

June 8 - 9 I attended the Earth Spirit Rising conference held in Louisville which attracted more than 400 people featured Star Hawk, Margaret Wheatley, Kilpatrick Sale, Michael Pollan and Michael Dowd. SCN was able to connect with many other sustainability activists from around the country.

On **July 31** as member of the food, education and greenspace committees of the Bluegrass Partnership for Green Community, I

helped organize and present at the professional development workshop "Local Food and Sustainability" designed for area school teachers. The teachers learned how to cook with solar ovens, how to integrate gardens into their curriculum, were taken on a tour of the Farmer's Market and received information about local food systems.

The **September 29** Healthy Farms-Local Food conference sponsored by the Sierra Club and held in Louisville featured Alice Waters and Wendell Berry. SCN conducted a workshop on *Community and School Gardens*. Students from Montessori Middle School of Kentucky here in Lexington also featured presenters on their land based curriculum at their outdoor classroom on Stone Road.

August 9 -12 attended the American Community Gardening Association Conference in Boston along with 300+ gardening activists from around the US, Canada and Europe.

On **September 7** I attended the Rain Gardens Seminar sponsored by LFUCG. This seminar has inspired the **2010 Rain Gardens by 2010** citywide campaign which is similar to the 10,000 Rain Gardens campaign in Kansas City. Rain gardens will become an important part of storm water management and Lexington.

October 6-7 at the Bluegrass Energy and Green Living Expo conducted two workshops on "Sustainability Principles and Practice" and "Community Gardening."

November 12 I was recognized for community service at the Environmental Commission Awards Luncheon.

Other green efforts include:

SCN organizes meetings with Councilmember Linda Gorton, architects, teachers and city engineers to strategize about encouraging greenroofs on government and school buildings.

One of the exciting and fun ways to involve youth in sustainability efforts is to get them involved in designing green maps for their school, neighborhoods and communities. We are presently organizing the Green Map System Competition and Challenge that will culminate in green maps by Earth Day 2008.

Cool Cities Project organized by the local Sierra Club seeks to establish a baseline and develop strategies to reduce CO2 emissions in Lexington and get us in alignment with the Kyoto Protocol.

SCN community interactions include working with Dunbar High School, Tates Creek Middle School, Booker T. Washington Elementary, Lexington Traditional Magnet School, Providence Montessori, Lexington Universal Academy, Lafayette High School, Martin Luther King Academy to develop outdoor classrooms, memorial gardens, greenroofs, rain gardens and curriculum integration.

During the year I was invited to speak at UK, BCTC and Transylvania classes on sustainability and environmental justice.

I serve on the board of Goodfoods. Our manager, Anne Hopkins, traveled to Oaxaca Mexico in January to get a close look at fair trade coffee production. Good Foods serves as a community recycling center and this fall was awarded the Energy Star award for energy efficiency. Our board of directors is presently engaged in a yearlong study of local and national food systems and sustainability action plans.

During March my nature photography was part of an exhibit, "Glories of the Garden" held at UK Singletary Center and the Arboretum.

Looking ahead to 2008, Sustainable Communities Network in collaboration with other community partners such as Fayette County Public Schools, UK, Sierra Club, and state government is presenting **Green Tools for Green Schools**—community forum and regional summit. On February 21 from 6pm - 8pm the **Greens Schools 101—Community Forum** and on February 29 & March 1 from 9-4pm the **Green Schools-Regional Community Summit** will be held.

Info, contact Jim Embry at **859.312.7024, jgembr0@cs.com, sustainlex.org** ■