Homer Garden Club Minutes

October 20, 2019

The meeting was opened at 2:12 p.m. by President Kathy Dubé at AJ’s Steak House in Homer. The Aspen Hotel had inadvertently double-booked their conference room where the club meeting was to be held, but they made quick arrangements for AJ’s to allow us to meet in their back dining area. Kathy thanked the staff at AJ’s Restaurant for accommodating the club on such short notice.

Francie Roberts told the attendees that within the last two weeks someone had brought equipment onto the property of a family off East End Road and dug up several mature Lodgepole pines, approximately 15 feet tall. She asked that if anyone heard or saw anything that might indicate who removed the trees, they notify police.

Peggy Craig said if anyone needed carrots, she had some to give away, and Kathy Dubé said she had plenty of potatoes to give away (she had shown her potatoes to the group earlier).

The major business for the day was to vote on the slate of officers for the 2019-2020 year. Two volunteers were still needed: Recording Secretary and Social Coordinator.

After an inspirational pep talk by Brenda Adams, two people volunteered for the positions. The slate of officers were:

President – Kathy Dubé’

Co-Vice Presidents -- Jan Peyton and Sally Coleman

Recording Secretary – Ruth Dickerson

Social Coordinator – Michael Murray

Treasurer – Louise Ashmun

Database – Barbara Kennedy

Publicity – Julie Parizek

Newsletter – Paula Riley

Historian – Elaine Burgess

A vote was taken and the 2019-2020 officers were elected.

Louise Ashmun gave a brief Treasurer’s Report; a detailed report was printed in the newsletter. She mentioned that the club had more spending dollars, so it was decided by the board to spend more on technology items, and a new projector (which projected excellent resolution on the big screen) was purchased. She suggested that people submit ideas for future project that would further gardening education in the community. Peggy Craig suggested the club increase travel expenses for guest speakers to obtain out-of-town gardening experts.

Brenda Adams said that the Gardeners Weekend Committee had retired after 13 years of coordination. She said that the club needs new people volunteering, and the weekend event is open to new formats. An estimated 450 people tour each year, so it is an important community event. Brenda said their committee produced a notebook with all the steps for planning and executing the Weekend events… it could be used to guide the committee or the committee could introduce new ideas. Louise mentioned that the approved operating budget has seeded the 2020 Weekend $2,500., so finances were not an obstacle to a successful operation.

Kathy reminded everyone to pay their annual dues if they had not done so already.

Sally Coleman introduced the guest speaker, Father Fred Bugarin, who retired from the Anchorage Diocese in 2016 after 40 years of service. Originally from the Philippines, Father Fred immigrated with his family to the United States at age 16. On his trips back to the Philippines, he has been trying to introduce dramatic changes to farming/agriculture by encouraging better permaculture and sustainability practices. He helped establish a nonprofit organization called “ECOGENESIS=Building a One Earth Community,” that is focusing on a mountainous area in three provinces (like our states) in the northeast Philippines. (A flyer explaining the nonprofit organization and detailing support opportunities was handed out at the meeting. Information is available at the website: http://www.eco-genesis.org/ecogenesis. )

The nonprofit organization is guided by the vision developed in the United Nations One Earth Charter Initiative. The Pope is currently meeting with churches and country leaders to discuss principles of sustainable, efficient farming, especially in the Amazon region, known as the “Lungs of the Earth.” They are combating poverty, improving the dignity of the human race, and developing an integrative approach to a productive Earth. ECOGENISIS focuses on education and training, working with teachers and staff in schools. An important aspect of their work is to build and maintain good relationships with farmers to rebuild and revitalize land from years of chemical poisoning.

Father Fred showed a slide show of the area his organization works in -- the mountainous terrain that used to be forested, but trees have been cut for timber and the hillsides are now covered in grass, with the fertile land sliding downhill as erosion devastates the area. The group has a 3.2-acre area for a farming model/educational center.

Workers use Keyline Design (A-frames with a plumb-bobs) to determine where gullies & ditches can best be placed to direct water running down the hillsides, and where catchment ponds with swales and berms can be created to slow the water and let it sink in. Their motto is: “Teaching running water how to walk!”

Trails for foot access have been created; compost pits have become valuable. Volunteers are planting sweet potatoes, which create good ground cover as well as food (these were used extensively during Haiti’s recovery); as well as red rice that has a high nutrient value, and corn. Access roads are now being created for heavier equipment, with culverts to direct the water under the roads, protecting them from erosion. Catchment basins are filled and fish, especially tilapia, are raised for food. An additional benefit is the number of mosquitoes and their larvae eaten by the tilapia! Many of the terracing projects are created with riprap using river rocks.

Other slides showed talented workers weaving long grass to create “green roofs” that cover huts and open shelters. This Cogan grass survives through weather extremes from the monsoon seasons through dry seasons. Wells for potable water are hand dug in shallow areas and machine dug in areas of deeper water table, and pumps are used to bring water to the surface. Compost and mulch are created with a wood chipper that was donated by partners in Homer.

More slides showed the General Assembly Meeting, where villagers come together for making decisions and plans for future projects. Opportunities for education and training in permaculture design are determined for people who show promise in holistic farming practices. Another practice gaining acceptance is the vertical garden, where people can grow more nutritional food in less space. Young people in the area are learning to create these vertical gardens using local materials.

There is also genetic research being done to modify rice plants to rise above the water in the fields, which is deeper these days due to climate changes.

Father Fred’s main messages revolved around

--controlling the water runoff on downhill slopes,

--growing more nutritional food in less space,

--changing the practices of farmers who have grown dependent on chemical fertilizer, and

--accepting that sustainability is the key to our planet’s future.

After Father Fred answered several questions from the audience, the meeting concluded at 3:45 p.m. Our thanks to the Garden Club Board for providing refreshments for this meeting.