

THE Hardw

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Latin American NGOs Take Notes On Local Model

by Tommy Gardner

HARDWICK — Visitors from about a half-dozen Latin American countries toured the town Monday, to see how the Center for an Agricultural Economy and the “Hardwick Model” might be influential as organizational models in their home countries.

The visit was sponsored by the Vermont Council on World Affairs, under the auspices of the International Visitor Leadership Program. According to Eli Harrington from VCWA, there are currently almost 300 current and former heads of state who once participated on the Leadership Program. Some of those alums include Afghan President Hamid Karzai, French President Nicolas Sarkozy and British Prime Minister Gordon Brown.

Monday’s main focus was non-governmental organization management. The visitors hailed from Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia,

Guatemala and Mexico.

In a two-hour question and answer period at CAE headquarters, the group heard the oft-repeated mantra about the Hardwick area’s circular model — seeds to crops to value-added foods to compost and back to seeds. CAE president Tom Stearns told the story that is becoming an inspiration to people well beyond the area. He also spoke briefly of other non-profits in the area, such as the Northern Rivers Land Trust, Highfields and Northern Counties Health Care.

But the meat of the conversation came in the question and answer period, where Stearns and others fielded questions about much larger issues, like government subsidies, soil health, and the rising cost of oil.

Colombian Zoraida Varela, representing the organization Lutheran World Relief, said her country’s citi

See NGOS, Page Four

Barnes Returns To Twinfield As Interim Principal

by Will Walters

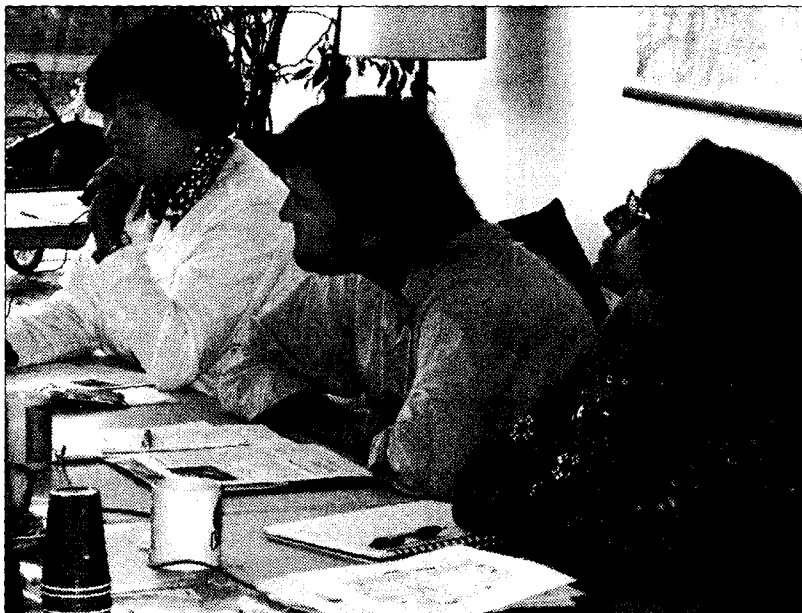
MARSHFIELD — Christine Barnes, a former administrator at Twinfield Union School, was hired to

sociate principal in 1997 and then interim principal before Bradley was hired. She served as co-principal and co-administrator with Bradley from



Fu

A Circus Smiles troupe...



Zoraida Valera, right, from Colombia and Gaston Mascias, middle, from Argentina listen as a translator relays comments about local food systems in the Hardwick area. Valera and Mascias represent NGOs in their countries. (photo by Tommy Gardner)

NGOs

Continued From Page One

zens are promoting organic and local agriculture but are meeting a lot of resistance. Varela asked about how trade agreements affect other countries' efforts at promoting local agriculture.

Stearns noted that as oil prices continue to rise, the emphasis on local food will be more necessary, since it will not be feasible to ship food over long distances when it can be grown and distributed within a smaller radius. He noted in the current food system in the U.S., it is cheaper to get lettuce from 3,000 miles away than it is from 3 miles. Much of the reason such food is cheaper is because the U.S. government subsidizes it. So that cheaper price tag?

"It's fake," Stearns said.

Elena Gustavson, the CAE's education and community outreach coordinator, chimed in, noting artisanal value-added foods are a good way to ensure farmers can get paid for their products, but it is important to be able to feed one's community.

Regarding subsidies, Stearns used the country of Ethiopia as an example. That country imports its wheat, because the farming of the grain has not been practiced over the past generations, since they can get it so cheap from the U.S.

"Well, when there's a drought in North Dakota, Ethiopia gets no wheat," Stearns said.

Diego Merino, executive director

of Bolivia's Fundacion Educativa Cultural noted eggs are a major agricultural moneymaker for Bolivians, and they are typically raised using organic methods. But Merino wanted to know how can a country like Bolivia "compete with the monster" that is the U.S. with its trade laws?

Joanne Clark, who works for an NGO in Washington D.C., and was key in getting the Latin American delegates to Hardwick (she is the sister of Hardwick Select Board vice-chair Kathleen Hemmens), noted subsidies are "very political." Clark said politicians from most states fight for some kind of subsidy. She did mention a name familiar to Vermonters that had every delegate saying "como?" and writing down his name: Leahy.

Griselda Duarte, an Argentinean representing Fundacion Agreste, bemoaned the fact that heavy mono-crop growing methods are turning much of the world into deserts. Many of the delegates seemed surprised when Stearns spoke about the dust bowl in the 1930s that accompanied the Great Depression, where much of America's crops turned to dust.

Stearns went on to criticize mega-corporations that make seeds that are tolerant to "salty soil," as Duarte called it. He said companies need to concentrate on different seeds for different climates.

"(Or else) then we get to a point where science cannot keep up with the desert," he said.

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