

## Drawing a Green Bottom Line

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Two-thirds of Americans identify themselves as "environmentalists," and more than four in five tell pollsters they agree with the goals of "the environmental movement."

But how many know what they're talking about?

Believing that an educated environmentalist is an effective environmentalist, Rick Theis last week launched a program designed for producing a new crop of environmental leaders in Sonoma County. Modeled loosely after the Chamber of Commerce's "Leadership Santa Rosa" program, the yearlong course in "Leadership Training for a Sustainable Future" aims to teach participants the connections between the environment and the economy.

Or, as the inaugural class of 26 discovered in its first meeting Thursday, they'll be talking about profit and loss as much as about birds and bees.

Theis, the former executive director of the Sonoma County Grape Growers Association, says the idea for such a program has been kicked around in Sonoma County for at least a decade but went nowhere because of a lack of money and sponsorship.

Early this year, using stock that he'd had since he worked for Coca-Cola in the early '80s, Theis founded the Leadership Institute for Ecology and the Economy as a nonprofit umbrella for the educational program and, he says, "to be a community resource for information about sustainability."

Theis said his goal is, 10 years from now, "for every city council in the county to include at least one member who's been through this program."

Thursday's first meeting revealed a class that includes not just aspiring leaders, but policy makers and community activists from throughout Sonoma County, and even a few from Mendocino County. Answering roll call were Pamela Tuft, Petaluma's general plan administrator; Bob Jordan, a Cloverdale planning commissioner; Terry Tinagero, a candidate for the Santa Rosa City Council; and Scott Vouri, a candidate for the Petaluma City Council. On the roll but not present were Cloverdale Councilman Michael Nixon and Lawrence Jaffe, aide to Assemblywoman Pat Wiggins.

Tinagero, who said his views about environmentalism have changed as he's grown older, said he came to the class "because the old way isn't working and it's time to do something different." Elizabeth McCarthy, a Sebastopol attorney, said, "I want to go from being a bystander to being a participant."

David Berry of Kenwood said, "I want to make sure that this is still a place where we want to live in 20 years."

"Sustainable" is a word increasingly used by environmentalists to describe the type of development practices they can support. Some adherents maintain it can be scientifically defined, but the difference between sustainable and nonsustainable often seems to be in the eye of the beholder.

Theis said the program aims to cut through the murkiness.

"It may seem amorphous, enigmatic and complex, but the simple definition is: something that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs," Theis said. "In this class we'll look at things with three questions in mind: Is it environmentally friendly? Is it economically viable? Is it socially equitable?"

The class spent Thursday morning acquiring some of the tools they'll need to answer Theis' questions. Adina Merenlender, a conservation biologist for the University of California, showed the value and the limitations of maps and geographic information systems in defining and measuring resources. And Moira Chatton, an accounting instructor at Santa Rosa Junior College, gave a quick lesson in reading balance sheets and profit-and-loss statements.

"You need to know what you're talking about when someone asks,

`What's the bottom line?'" Chatton said. "If you want a business to change the way it operates, you need to be able to help them find an alternate path to the bottom line."

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