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Green dream

Lisa Paulson, who wrote a book about High Wind, an intentional community in Sheboygan County, stood near the solar house she shares with her husband, Belden.

Buy the book

"An Unconventional Journey: The Story of High Wind from Vision to Community to Eco-Neighborhood" is available for \$16.95 and may be ordered online at Thistlefieldbooks.com. The book also may be ordered through Thistlefield Books, W7122 County Road U, Plymouth, WI 53073.



A road sign designates the location of the former intentional community. Hundreds of visitors came from many states and foreign countries to attend workshops and seminars.

Author recounts journey toward sustainability

PLYMOUTH — Now in their 80s, Belden and Lisa Paulson nurtured and nudged big dreams and never checked their idealism at the door.

Back in the 1980s, the Sheboygan County couple led efforts to develop an eco-village modeled after an



Belden Paulson

intentional community in northern Scotland.

The idea was to demonstrate links between spiritual, social, ecological and economic aspects while advocating new frontiers in alternative energy.

Their project came on the heels of long lines

at gas stations during an energy crisis in the Carter administration.

Called High Wind, it attracted like-minded individuals who eyed ways to reduce their carbon footprint on the planet. Some gave up their jobs to relocate to a small farm owned by Belden and Lisa Paulson.

A primary objective was to create connections between people and nature, with people living in conscious harmony and cooperation with nature.

Belden saw the High Wind project as a demonstration farm. A political scientist and futurist specialist, he founded the first department at UW-Milwaukee to deal with issues of race and poverty in the 1960s in the Milwaukee inner city.

"We tried to look where we were going and trying to think about politics, economics, education and ecology," Belden said. "My focus was to look at ways to make it real and make it possible."

Sustaining early ideals

While the experiment called High Wind eventually petered out, visible reminders attest to the fact that almost two decades later sustainable projects still flourish.

Examples include the passive solar home the Paulsons built at the edge of the Northern Kettle Moraine State Forest.

Except for three months

when they live in Vermont, the couple lives in their energy-efficient home, which has been the subject of several statewide renewable-energy tours.

The project has had a lasting impact on the people who were a part of it too.

David Lagerman, who headed the research department at the Milwaukee Journal, was an early participant in the intentional community. He now has a home that sports a sun tracker. It's a device that follows the sun during the day, turning from east to west.

It generates enough electricity for Lagerman to sell surplus electricity back to the utility.

More than 20 years ago the Paulsons sold 25 acres of land to Peter and Bernadette Seeley, who established one of the first community-supported-agriculture farms in the Midwest. Today it provides produce for 800 families.

Project history

The story of High Wind has been captured in the book "An Unconventional Journey," written by Lisa Paulson.

A New Jersey native, Lisa admits to marching to the beat of a different drum.

Both Paulsons graduated from Oberlin College in Ohio, where graduates were expected to contribute community service following graduation. They did not know each other there and met in 1952 in Naples, Italy, where Belden worked at a social settlement center relocating World War II refugees.

The couple married in 1954.

In 1957 the couple returned to Italy where they purchased land in Sardinia to resettle war refugees.

A native of Oak Park, Ill., Belden obtained his doctorate from the University of Chicago. The couple moved to Wisconsin in 1962, where Belden began a 30-year teaching career at UW-Milwaukee.

In 1976, Lisa visited the Findhorn intentional community in northern Scotland.

She was motivated to bring ideas back to Wisconsin based on what she observed in Scotland, where people practiced sustainability, including making homes out of recycled whiskey barrels.

"We just felt whatever we were learning, it was important to share," Lisa said. "A small core of people at UW-



Above: Solar panels dominate a bioshelter at High Wind. A greenhouse is in front and living quarters are in the back. A government grant of \$25,000 paid for materials, and volunteers built the facility.

Right: The Paulsons purchased a 46-acre farm in the 1960s near Plymouth. The original barn and chicken coop served as living quarters and meeting facilities for the High Wind community.

Milwaukee talked about doing something about renewable energy. We've got to do something practical to do demonstrations. We got the group together and incorporated as a nonprofit."

Challenging times

In the book, Lisa recounts highs and lows of High Wind over more than a dozen years. While the emphasis was on sustainability, issues arose over a lack of finances among the volunteers.

When High Wind was founded in the 1980s, it didn't surprise the Paulsons that people were willing to give up their jobs and enter a new part of their careers.

"It would be very hard now," she said. "At that time there was a lot of idealism."

During the 1990s High Wind became a learning center.

"We were doing seminars during that time in cooperation with the university," Belden said. "We had 700 inner-city kids who would come up for four days at a time."

While High Wind had a global reach, it had difficulty connecting with the local community in turning back



rumors on what was going on at the farm.

"Even though High Wind was a nonprofit, we always paid property taxes," Belden said.

His wife agreed that it was difficult to conduct outreach in a conservative community.

"We were a very strange group of mostly young people, although Bel and I were the older generation," she said. "They would dream up all these strange ideas of what we were about, when we were about as straight as they come, actually."

Charges that High Wind was a colony of hippies or a nudist colony were frequently heard.

The culture clash came to a head when High Wind proposed a model eco-village patterned after those in Scotland.

Residents of the town of Mitchell opposed the venture

on many grounds, with the town board ultimately enacting a moratorium on such projects.

Although the project was opposed locally, the Plymouth Review newspaper thought the idea had merit.

"As you look back, those are now mainstream ideas," said Barry Johanson, publisher of the Review. "I don't know if they were ahead of their time, but they certainly were experiencing something a lot of people were feeling. They were actually doing something about it creatively."

In the end, Johanson said, the Paulsons realized the track they were on wasn't going to go much further. "It wasn't sustainable," Johanson said.

Mel Blanke, a Plymouth attorney who serves on the High Wind board, agreed that the idea of an eco-vil-

lage created a lot of controversy in the neighborhood.

"The idea in general for a development was something they were concerned about," Blanke said. "People don't always like other people moving in, and they weren't quite sure what it was. The neighbors were concerned."

Blanke said the Paulsons seemed to be always involved in the forefront of sustainability.

"If there's one thing (that's) a problem, it's being ahead of your time," Blanke said. "Now if you talk about condominiums people are a lot more interested. At that time there was a lot of negative talk. One person thought condominiums meant communism. To some people it was just a little too avant-garde."

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