
Appalachian Community Fund

Newsletter



Summer 2003

Coal Miner's Daughter Wins World's Biggest Environmental Prize

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by Shireen Parsons, Appalachian
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[NOTE: ACF is very proud of this achievement by Judy Bonds of Coal River Mountain Watch. ACF provided CRMW with its first grant five years ago. Later grants paid for staff positions, like Judy's. This year, CRMW received its fifth consecutive grant from ACF!]

The Goldman Environmental Prize, known as the "Nobel Prize of the grassroots environmental movement," is awarded each year to six outstanding activists, one from each of the inhabited continental regions.

This year, the list of winners includes one of Appalachia's own: Judy Bonds, of West Virginia's Coal River Mountain Watch. Judy is a little fire-cracker of a woman whose name fills coal company execs and industry-owned politicians with

dread. She was born in Marfork Hollow, near Whitesville. Her father, grandfather, great-grandfather were deep miners. Life was hard, but life was good.

Judy remembers when Whitesville was a vibrant town. Two movie theaters, a bowling alley, restaurants, hotel, post office, schools, youth center... There were thriving communities the length of the Coal River Valley. "Now," she says, "we've lost everything."

In West Virginia alone, mountaintop removal mining has leveled nearly 1,000 square miles of mountains, and permits are in place to bury 1,000 miles of streams.

Judy says, "This is what the coal industry has done throughout Appalachia. And, if coal is so good for our economy, why are the Appalachian coal states the poorest in the nation?"

In 1993, Judy was working in a convenience store and sharing a

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home on the family property with her daughter Lisa and her grandson Andrew. That's when coal giant Massey Energy came to Marfork Hollow. She assumed it was a coal mining operation like all the rest. Then things changed. Some of her neighbors had heard bad things about Massey -- how the company destroyed towns, mistreated its miners, and trashed the environment.

Massey bought out a few houses that were in the way and started mining operations 24/7. The coal dust generated from the prep plant, the monster coal trucks, and trains

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Announcing the JustCause Initiative for Anti-war Organizing

A new Seize the Moment Initiative, JustCause, will have special funds available soon. The program will award grants between \$500 and \$3,000 to grassroots activism on local anti-war organizing, immigrant rights, civil liberties, the economic impact of war, and other peace work and organizing around the "war at home."

The \$10,000 grant from an anonymous donor in partnership with the Funding Exchange will be used to leverage other funding for anti-war and peace work in the region. The intent of the program is to build sustainability for organizing in response to the events of the last two years in national and foreign policy as well as to strengthen prior work in these areas. The applica-

tion for funding is in process and will be sent out in the first week of August for an August 30 deadline. Please call or e-mail the ACF office for more information or to share the names of groups who might be interested in this funding.

"This is a critical time for community organizing around this issue," commented ACF Executive Director Gaye Evans. "The momentum gained opposing the war on Iraq was astonishing. These grants will help to ensure that we can build on that energy."

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From the ACF Office...

 ACF just received two significant grants from the Ford Foundation and San Francisco-based Changemakers. The Ford grant is part of a \$500,000 grant to the Funding Exchange, of which ACF receives \$25,000 over two years. Committed to supporting resources for philanthropy in underserved areas of the country, Changemakers provided ACF with \$25,000 this year. Both grants will support ACF's efforts in fundraising and marketing.

 We welcomed four new board members to ACF in June. They are Karen Coffin, of Alcoa, Tenn., Paulina Hernandez, of New Market, Tenn., Barbara Reed, of Berea, Ky., and Chetan Talwalkar of Lexington, Ky. Each comes to ACF with a significant commitment to activism and social change in their community and throughout Appalachia.

 Two staff and four board members traveled to Chicago in May to attend a Funding Exchange Super Skills Workshop titled "Shades of Citizenship: Immigration, Citizen, Race and the Fight Against Repression." The weekend focused on the ways to fund effective organizing against poverty and oppression that is inclusive of all who live in the U.S. It was a wonderful opportunity to take stock of the national movement and to understand ACF's vital role in it.

 Board member Renee Scott and former board member Marian Colette are planning a house party at Marian's home in Emlyn, Ky. on August 23. They'll get together with friends in the area who care about making Appalachia a better place, eat dinner, learn more about the work ACF is doing in the region and have the opportunity to contribute. For more information on the upcoming party, or to find out how to host your own, please contact Marcelle Good at the ACF office.

2003 Grantmaking Announced!

In June, the ACF board finished another round of grantmaking, giving away more than \$280,000. More than 40 organizations working for social change in the region received grant awards averaging \$6,500. Grants are targeted to organizations and communities with little or no access to other funding. All of the groups work for change in Central Appalachia (east Tennessee, eastern Kentucky, southwest Virginia and all of West Virginia).

The ACF board of community activists makes all grantmaking decisions for the General Fund. They bring their knowledge of the region, community organizing and a broad range of issues to the table to fund

the best work for social justice in the region. Major support for the General Fund grants comes from the Alexander Fund of the New York Community Trust and from the financial contributions of individual donors.

Have you remembered the Appalachian Community Fund in your will? Contact the ACF office for more information on leaving a legacy of Change, not Charity for Appalachia.

Judy Bonds, *continued*

became unbearable. Andrew became the first in the family to suffer from asthma.

The scariest thing, though, was the black-water spills from Massey's sludge dam, three miles above their home -- intentional releases, every night. One day Judy found Andrew -- six years old -- wading in Little Marsh Fork, surrounded by floating dead fish.

Then she learned that the sludge dam, as permitted, would be 924 feet tall -- taller than the Grand Coolee Dam. That's an earthen dam, made out of coal waste -- essentially, coal waste holding back more coal waste.

Eventually, after their property had been completely devalued by Massey's operations, the family hired a lawyer and forced Massey to buy them out for a fair price.

In the summer of 1997, Judy saw a poster advertising a rally organized by Coal River Mountain Watch. She went to the rally and learned that the organization had an office in Whitesville and monthly meetings. She went to a meeting and never looked back.

She volunteered for two years, and began working full time as a part-time-paid organizer in 1999. Organizing, she explains, is empowering people, essentially, giving them the tools they need to fight for their rights -- information on mining laws, government and agency contacts, how to work the media....

A major strategy of Coal River Mountain Watch is slowing down the mine permitting process by dogged citizen participation. They believe that coal will be finished in the Coal River Valley by 2010, but, Judy says, "If we can save one mountain.... It's the fight that's important...."

A big win was the January 2003 victory of the people of Sylvester in the Sylvester dust trial, in which the

court ordered Massey to pay partial compensation for the five years of coal dust blanketing the town that has lowered property values by 90%. Massey must also abide by a monitoring plan, erect a dome over the stoker plant, and cover their piles of coal to reduce the dust. And the company is allowed to run "only" 7,000 coal trucks through this one-road town per year.

A bitter loss, also in January, was the Fourth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruling, which, based on an appeal by the Bush administration, overturned a landmark federal court ruling that banned mountaintop removal mining on the grounds that it violates the Clean Water Act.

Is Coal River Mountain Watch trying to kill the coal industry? "No," Judy says. "What we're after is responsible mining that benefits the mining communities. We bring out every truth about the coal industry -- it's a big, ugly picture. Mountaintop removal mining can't be done responsibly. Return to room and pillar deep mining. Do away with sludge dams. And reclamation? It's like cheap energy - there's no such thing."

What would she like to see in 10 years? "Educated and motivated people taking control of their communities and their lives -- actively involved in shaping their own future."

For Judy, the Goldman Prize means worldwide recognition of the social, economic and environmental issues of mountaintop removal mining. Important, too, will be the \$125,000 cash award, which will allow her to pay off her home mortgage. The remaining two thirds will fund projects of Coal River Mountain Watch and other grassroots organizations working to save the mountains, streams and communities of West Virginia.

One of those projects will be a

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national road show to promote the federal Pallone-Shays bill, the Clean Water Protection Act of 2003, which would prevent the expansion of the definition of "fill material" to include mining wastes and other pollutants. The bill is intended to support the true intentions of the Clean Water Act and oppose the Bush administration's efforts to turn our waterways into dumping grounds for industrial wastes.

Judy attended a Goldman awards ceremony in Washington, D. C., where she met with Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Christine Todd Whitman and have lunch with Ethel Kennedy.

Judy plans to ask Whitman why she allowed the Bush administration to gut the Clean Water Act. At the suggestion that Whitman might be a little nervous about meeting with this particular group, Judy grinned and said, "Well, I'm sure she won't be worried about me -- I bet she thinks I'm just an ignorant hillbilly."

Make that a steel hillbilly, forged in West-by-God Virginia -- a blast-furnace fired by corporate greed and political corruption.

Grantee News: What's Going On

 The **Appalachian Women's Alliance** is hosting its Tenth Anniversary Ironweed Festival on September 20 at the Southwest Virginia 4-H Center in Abingdon. Ironweed celebrates the artistic talent, regional leadership and courageous lives of Appalachian women through music, storytelling, poetry, dance, and visual arts. For more information on tickets and lodging call (859) 375-4229 or e-mail <awa@swva.net>.

 **Community Shares** of Tennessee will hold its annual Campaign Kickoff at Knoxville Center Mall on August 2 from 10-2. Member groups will have display tables set up and Community Shares staff and board will be available to answer questions about giving for social change in your workplace.

 **Democracy Resource Center** just released a report: *Kentucky's Coal Severance Tax: Looking Back, Looking Forward*. It includes information about the coal severance tax, how much has been collected since it was enacted, and what it has funded. It identifies the biggest economic development projects funded by the tax (many of which are empty or near empty industrial parks) and offers four suggestions for improvement. You can access the report from DRC's website at www.kydrc.org.

 Protest against the U.S. Army chemical weapons incinerator in Anniston, Alabama on Saturday, August 16. Sponsored by the **Kentucky Environmental Foundation's Chemical Weapons Working Group** in Berea. For more information or to be put on an email alert list, contact Elizabeth Crowe at elizabeth@cwwg.org or by calling (859) 986-0868.

 **Kingsport Citizens for a Cleaner Environment** made strides in keeping water in the South Fork of the Holston River cleaner when the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation made five revisions to the Weyerhaeuser's Kingsport Paper Mill's wastewater treatment permit application in July of 2003. KCCE members spoke about a lack of controls and monitoring of the company's treated wastewater at a mid-April public hearing.

 The **Oak Ridge Environmental Peace Alliance** and Pax Christi, USA are sponsoring five days of events to remember the devastating effects of nuclear weapons use and to protest the ongoing production of nuclear weapons at the Y12 Weapons Facility in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Events will run from August 6-10 and include a remembrance ceremony, a 4-day public fast, a non-violence training and a march, rally and action for peace. Go to www.stopthebombs.org or contact OREPA at (865)483-8202 for information.

 The Citizens for Clean Elections, a coalition of 26 groups supporting public funding of elections in West Virginia, is holding its first "Democracy Rescue" forum August 4 in Huntington. Cecilia Martinez, the featured speaker, is the Executive Director of the Reform Institute for Campaign and Election Issues in Arizona and will talk about how well Clean Elections are working in Arizona. This event is co-sponsored by the **Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition** and the Huntington League of Women Voters. For more information call 304-522-0246 or visit the OVEC website at www.ohvec.org.

 On August 16th, **Rose Center's** touring exhibit "Woodcarving 2003: A Volunteer Tradition" will return to the Center for an exhibition. Fifteen woodcarvers from around the region will be demonstrating their art. The old time band Citico, from Chattanooga, will add to the ambiance of the day with a blend of traditional ballads, songs and fiddle tunes. Contact the Center in Morristown, Tenn. at (423) 581-4330 for information.

 Kensington Welfare Rights Union is organizing The Poor People's March for Economic and Human Rights from Mississippi to Washington, D.C. They will be marching through Knoxville, Tenn., Clinchco, Va., and Charleston, W.Va. in mid-August. In Knoxville, they will gather at the **Solutions** office. For more information go to www.kwru.org or contact Anne Kretzmann at (215) 681-0447. For more information about the Knoxville schedule, contact Solutions at (865) 523-8009.

 **South Central Educational Development's** AIDS Resource Network will co-host a conference on health disparities in rural Appalachia. The conference will be at Bluefield State College in West Virginia on August 7 and 8 and will address HIV/AIDS, diabetes and cancer as they relate to rural populations and African Americans. Contact South Central at (304) 325-6105 for information.

 The Appalachian African American Cultural Center, in cooperation with the Lee and Wise County chapters of the **Virginia Organizing Project**, organized the 11th annual celebration of Race Unity Day in Lee County. The purpose of the event is to give recognition to the growing ethnic and cultural diversity of the community and to promote positive human relations. In other VOP news, the Wythe County Chapter joined with the Roundtable on Poverty to honor three local employers that pay a living wage at the second annual Living Wage Luncheon held May 7 in Wytheville.
