

"Good, on-the-money radical writing..." - George Sessions

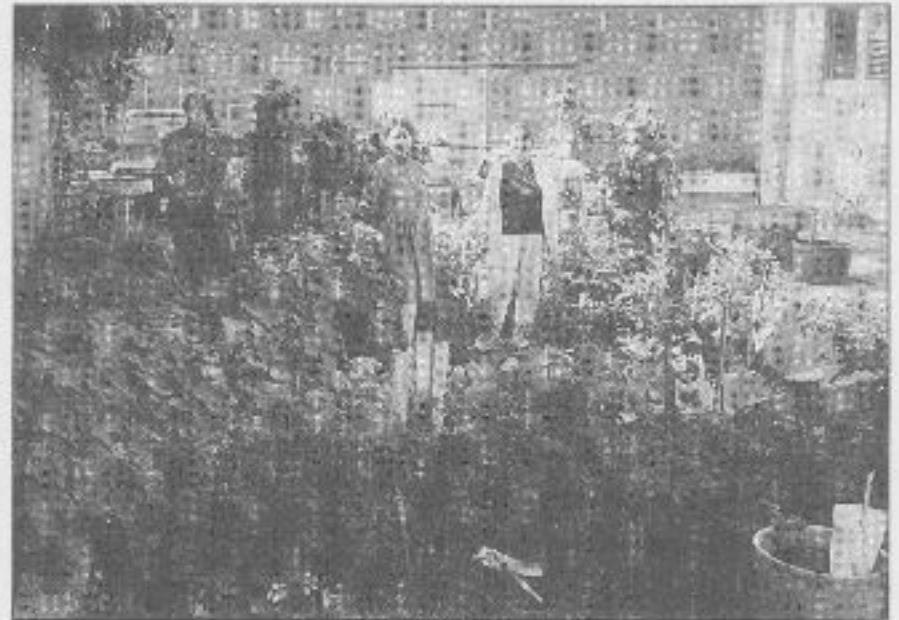
PAVING MORATORIUM

U P D A T E

and Auto-Free Times

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DEPAVING AMERICA!



The Fruits Of Depaving

Richard Register
Crank's up the Depaving
and Restoration

See pages 3 and 30 of
this "groundbreaking" issue

INSIDE: ▲ NATIVE AMERICAN VISION ▲ U.K. ROAD FIGHTING ARRIVES
▲ L.A. POST-EARTHQUAKE ▲ DANA LYONS: ROAD-BASHING TROUBADOR
▲ DR. JACK WARD RHETORIC ▲ HISTORIC ROAD-FIGHTING SUMMIT
▲ MEDICAL COSTS OF CAR DEPENDENCY ▲ HUAORANI OF ECUADOR

DO-IT-YOURSELF DEPAVING

Almost 4,000 residents in south Berkeley, Calif. are going to benefit from the vision of a neighborhood association and their hometown depaving guru.

Eliminating dozens of parking places in needlessly wide Halcyon Court (right) will enable a park (below) to be created. Using residents' own labor and donated services and materials, the total cost may be \$40,000 for the first stage and \$80-100,000 to complete.

Richard Register, the Depaving King, a.k.a. Mr. Ecocity, brought the *Update* the good news of this latest effort to begin evening the score with the car and its friends, the oil and paving interests. Richard's own story starts on page 30.

Although cars will still be allowed on the street, by the artist's rendition cars aren't part of the real future. The 200-foot by 40-foot park project is guided by the Halcyon Neighborhood Association. Its newsletter covers community happenings and explains how and why these neighbors are changing their lives and helping the embattled environment.

"Rather than moving to Oregon to get away from the urban issues of this area, we can increase the quality of life right here. Trees and greenery can



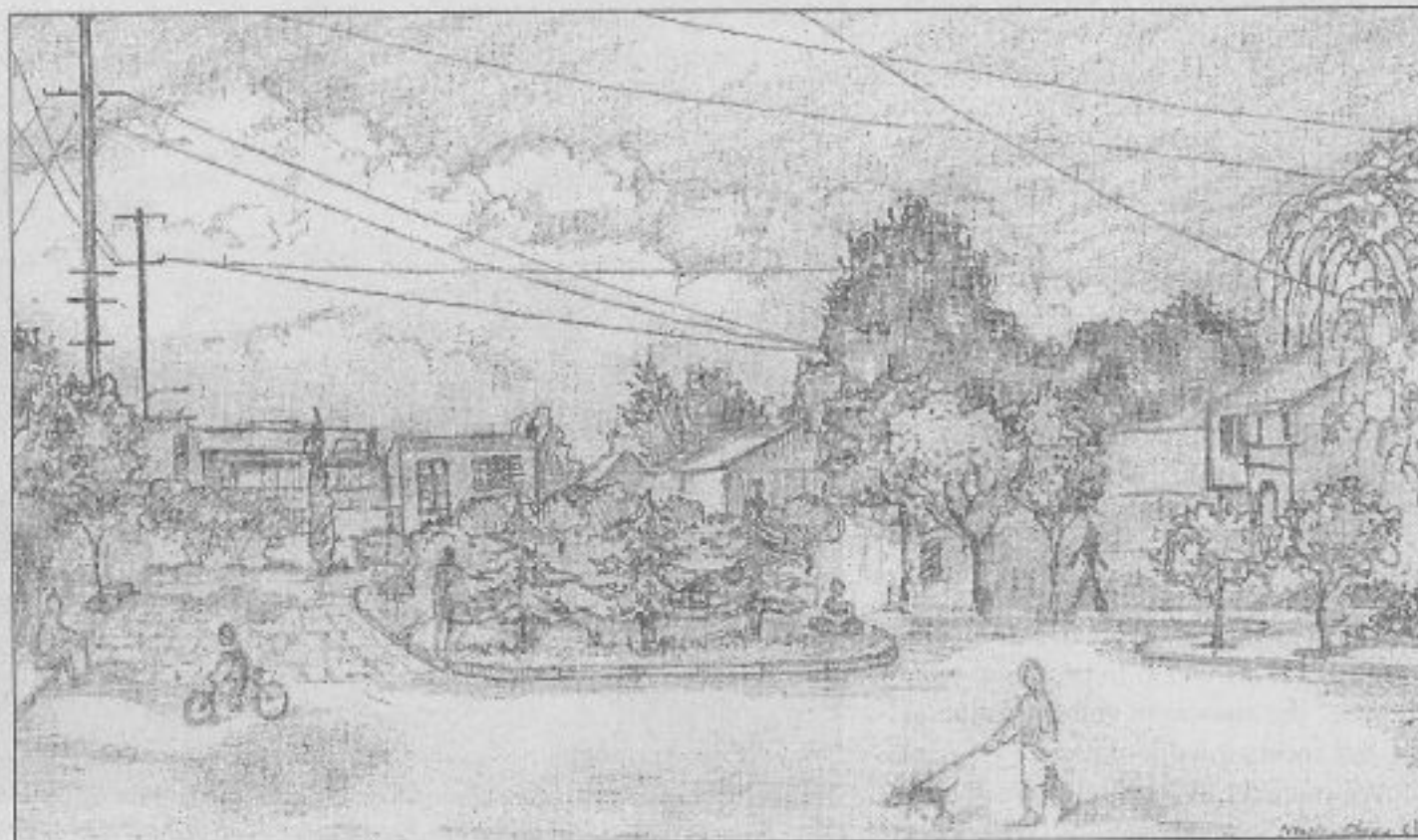
Now: Halcyon Court, Berkeley, as of May 1994. Photo by Susan E. Hunter

bring beauty to an area that is currently an ugly parking lot," wrote the Halcyon Commons Planning Committee.

The *Update* commissioned the photo and drawing, and now it's up to you to

seek out kindred spirits in your community to remove some of the Earth's recent artificial, suffocating skin of asphalt!

- Jan Lundberg, Editor and Publisher



The future of Halcyon Court. Drawing by John Thelen-Steere, May 1994.

DEPAVING BEGINNINGS

by Richard Register

Richard Register founded Urban Ecology, which brought about the world's first Ecocity Conference in 1990. He later founded Ecocity Builders in Oakland, California. He is completing the definitive book on ecocities.

Jan asked me to talk about my depaving exploits — "you're the depaving king, the guru," he told me. "Tell us how you got started and what it means to you."

Okay, but first we have to get something straight. Nobody has done much depaving—yet. Certainly I haven't. Meantime suburban sprawl paves over at least a million new acres of agricultural land every year in this country and probably a similar amount of natural, range and forest land. In addition, paving roads into natural areas denatures them almost overnight, contributes to species extinctions, and provides a reverse conveyor belt that sits frozen in place while steel and glass objects hurtle across it propelled by gasoline. Roads and vehicles kill a quarter million people a year world-wide, contaminating water via run-off and air via burning up the fossil petroleum that took 150 million years for the biosphere and lithosphere to cook up. Fossil petroleum is now disappearing at about one million years deposition per year, while changing the climate and, bizarrely, bestowing such scourges to the planet as the depletion of the ozone layer especially via automobile air conditioners. The destructive influence of cars and roads permeates society so thoroughly that it destroys completely and diabolically. For example, remember the captive breeding program to rescue the California condor from extinction? Two were released recently—one died drinking antifreeze!

I got started in depaving because I thought this was a pretty awful story. I was trying to build the positive alternative, but something was always in the way: sprawl, paving, car and oil industry advertising, bad personal transportation habits, and much more. As some readers know, I am identified with building a new

kind of town, the ecologically healthy community. I write books on "ecocities" and promote such built habitats.

I have for decades believed that the built habitat of humanity was wildly out of balance with nature. It is a big secret that this disastrous city structure is the foundation for the vast majority of other problems we suffer environmentally and socially. The city is the home of the Population, the engine of Affluence and that to which the Technologies are attached in Paul Ehrlich's formula: Human Impact = PAT. He misses the built community; leaving out entirely the land use/infrastructure, which I call the "landstructure" of the community, the anatomy of the living community—that physical body which we create and take so much for granted.

The foundation of so many disasters is in the structure of our cities. The addicts—us car drivers—don't want to hear about it. There is an agreement of silence on the subject. Politicians don't bring it up for fear of alienating their electorate. The fearful people who have bought into today's neighborhoods (and recoil at the thought of any change now that they have theirs) won't hear a word of it. The one out of six people who make their living working directly for cars, oil and highways don't want to hear about it. And the millions of others who can't imagine another life or who simply can't drive out to their logging job or from their farm to market can't imagine life any other way. Incidentally, I worked for a logging company once myself — my partner was killed in a car accident on the way to the same job the following year. When statisticians are calculating that one out of six Americans make their living on the car

and its infrastructure, they are blind to the fact that the entire construction and maintenance of suburbia is all part of the same thing.

It is the Four-Headed Monster of the Twentieth Century Apocalypse: the car/sprawl/highways/oil complex, held together largely by television which provides a vicarious, counterfeit "community feeling." The Monster is defended by the American military whose most recent big action was to keep oil cheap, at the cost of around 170,000 lives, where oil doth ooze. That Four-Headed Monster, craving dozens of channels of vapid TV and oceans of fiery gasoline, is the body of our city. Pull out any one of the integral parts and it tends to fall apart. So, as part of the effort to transform cities, it was only natural to try to roll back that asphalt mattress suffocating ever more life on Earth.

I haven't thought about my own early involvement in depaving for a long time, but now that I do, just for this fine journal, I realize it goes back to the first evil words I heard against cars that issued from my

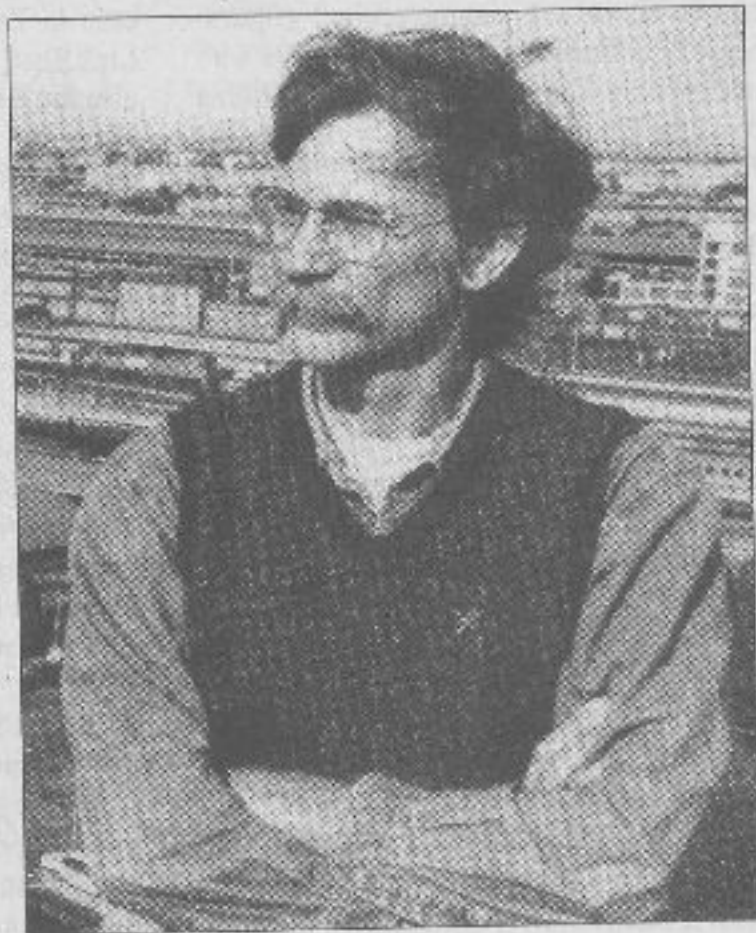


Photo by Sandy Schelteme of Richard Register in Merbourne

architect father who loved carless areas of European cities, and from Paolo Soleri, who in 1965 proposed totally carless cities to my receptive 21-year-old cars.

The thinking started to get real when I was promoting the idea for a world holiday on the equinoxes—that is, unlike the April Earth Day—in the natural cycles of our planet. I was planning an event in 1970 with Robin Cranston, Senator Alan's son. Robin was a wild man. Robin and I drove to a donated office in Universal Studios, next door to Paul Newman's office, to plan the equinox event. My car had no brakes because I had no money.

It was probably on one of those car trips—a silver lining on the dark cloud—that we brainstormed the depaving idea into its first clear image. To us it looked like fun. We had heard of a big airfield that had been abandoned. Maybe, said Robin, we could have a gigantic rock concert to tear up the artificial rock there, like Woodstock, which had happened just one year earlier, but a Woodstock that would *do* as well as *say* something. Fresh in our mind was Joni Mitchell's recent song, "Yellow Taxi," with the immortal lines, "Don't it always seem to go/ that you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone/ they pave paradise, put up a parking lot." But this colossal depaving scheme was too big and complex for us. A good idea, though. I hope we can do it on some nasty freeway some day.

It was about then that oil-company chemists were experimenting with micro-organisms that they said would eat up oil in water, which of course would make ecological virtue of oil spills, since those petrol-stuffed microbes would happily enter the bottom of the food chain and work their way up to turtles and rare coelacanths and the like: "oil as nourishment" or maybe "wildlife fertilizer." Robin said he had a friend in Australia who reported that there was a very small beetle there that nibbled the oily asphalt substance between grains of sand and aggregate in asphalt highways, and we did a lot of gleeful plotting over how to get the critter up from down under to eat up American highways and sprawl. Unfortunately, his contact did not re-materialize, and the savior bugs never turned up in mail boxes or international luggage, neither as eggs, larva nor adults. The top

secret import effort was put on ice and a few years later Robin was killed by a car before we could re-brainstorm it, the same year my logging friend was killed. When Alan and Robin Cranston stepped out of a restaurant in Los Angeles, Robin volunteered to drive the car, stepped up to the door and was swept away before his father's very eyes by another car. Al Gore saw his own son treated so shabbily and violently a few years later, a turning point in his life he says in *Earth in the Balance*. Maybe he'll be a depaving ally some day.

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Robin's death didn't prevent me from actually trying out some depaving, in fact I did that even before he was killed. At the time, Earth Day, 1974—that's what we called the March equinox that year—Robin was off doing something else but I had been hired by the San Diego Ecology Center to organize an exhibition and series of talks and actions called "Energy Coming and Going: Transportation Alternatives for a Better Future" which started off at a local shopping center and ended up on the San Diego State College campus. I talked the manager of the Lutheran Campus Center there into depaving about six parking spaces in front of his building—and we did. It was all part of the many events of Earth Week bringing attention to bicycles, transit, solar, wave power, biogas production, recycling, new and traditional kinds of architecture and agriculture, military energy use and pollution, whole systems planning and so on. We had Soleri, solar energy pioneers Harold Hay and Steve Baer, an actual nuclear power plant designer, some stuffy bureaucrats, effusive New Age types, and many other speakers. Gary Snyder came down to put us in the mood. Even now-governor Pete Wilson, friend of nature and other alien forces, then mayor of San Diego, signed a declaration in support of

our event. At the depaving site, where asphalt cracked up so satisfyingly, we planted the kind of food the ancient locals used to plant, and celebrated organic dinner at the center with Snyder and all us activists.

That was my Depaving #1. The media loved it. Along with tearing up several lawns in suburbia to plant shocking rows of corn, peas and melons, we had, with our depaving, entered the frontal assault against apple pie, motherhood and suburbs all in one swoop.

Many years went by. I founded an organization called Urban Ecology with a handful of wild-eyed friends of Paolo Soleri's Arcosanti project in 1975 but not until 1981 did my anti-suburban bad habit emerge publicly again. Though the group talked endlessly against cars, sprawl, freeways and oil, it was only when the organization bought a house in Berkeley that depaving was made possible.

We could have depaved by changing city policy, but we were not powerful enough to rewrite substantial city codes. True, we did in a sense depave a 360-horse-power Pontiac GTO, by cutting off its roof with an acetylene torch and filling its hood, trunk and passenger compartment with earth and living vegetables and flowers. It was the famous Vegetable Car, monument to the automobile's first kill, H.H. Bliss, run over by an *electric* taxi, on September 13, 1899, at Central Park West and 74th St., New York City—just a few steps from the spot where John Lennon was shot to death.

The Vegetable Car softened up the beach and we rolled out sledge hammers, crowbars and shovels. Then we tore out the concrete which covered our future "planter strip" (that thin piece of land between sidewalk and curb where particular things may or may not grow according to local ordinance and the owner's or renter's determination). Fruit trees were not allowed in Berkeley planter strips, but we planted one apple and one apricot anyway—and the neighborhood loved them well enough. The government predicted dire consequences, like people slipping on fruit and suing the city for death and dismemberment, perhaps third degree burns from fires lit when their bodies careened off the sidewalk from slippery apricots directly into adjacent parked cars or

fellow pedestrians. Neither did the populace rise to riot, pitched battles waged by youth throwing under-ripe missiles at one another. Neither did the trees bring out the greedy hoarding of citizens tempted to go bad by the bounty on the streets. Neither did the homeless set up in our front yard to get their daily allowance of all the food groups from our two generous trees.

When it seemed fruit were disappearing faster than we owners wanted, grown in our little depaved strip of living sod, we simply put up a sign: "Please don't take more than one fruit a day; leave some for the people who planted the trees. Thanks!" It was well respected; we were still fonts of largess in our own opinion, and the kids and adults alike saw the blossoming, growing, and falling of fruits and leaves just as if we were all part of a living environment—right here in the city! How educational! We were after all an educational, 501 (c)(3) tax-deductible corporation—and each of us individuals living at the house, an educator in this small way.

Come Earth Day 1993, the April date this time, I had abandoned the Urban Ecology Board of Directors to start a new group since they were preventing me from doing about 90% of what I thought was most important for the ecocity movement to do. My new organization, Ecocity Builders, was invited to help UA Homes, an old hotel converted into a residence for 75 formerly homeless people, in their Earth Day gardening project: depaving about six parking spaces. A crew materialized with a few trucks and a load of sledge hammers, pry bars and soil amendments, seeds and young plants (see cover). A great cathartic pleasure was had by all and today the garden, originally opposed strenuously by the city bureaucracy of Berkeley, whose ordinances insist on massive parking facilities, is green, thriving and producing a considerable outpouring of food and goodwill, vitamins, calories

and bright colors where once lived smelly oil slicks and dark gray.

Most recently, I joined a woman named Linda Schneider in her fine efforts to bring fruit trees into the East Bay (Oakland, Emeryville, Berkeley, Richmond, etc.) for low-income projects and individuals. I supported the idea and asked if I could have some of the trees donated by rural nurseries (that generally served agriculture) for my own purposes too: food trees for public parks and gardens, streets and non-profit organizations, as well as low-income people. She agreed and I brought 800 trees into town in my pick-up truck, part of the total of more than 2,500 she has secured so far. Of these I kept 75 trees, some of which have popped up in a private planter strip on a public street,

have helped liberate only 12 parking places and three planter strips; obviously, the fad has not consumed the country. Tens, maybe hundreds, of millions of planter-strip and parking-space places have been paved over in the meantime. We need a sense of proportion about such things. We need a strategy with real potential of powerful changes or we are depaving chiefly to fool ourselves into thinking we're such good friends of the Earth.

We need to actually rezone cities around centers of walkable distances, assisted by bicycles and some transit. Ecocity zoning is the linchpin. Only if we can go that far, and begin creating the city of walkable centers which brings enough aspects of our lives close together, can we be free of the spreading asphalt cloak of doom. We need to realize that the dysfunctional Four-Headed Monster of cars, sprawl, highways and oil needs to be replaced with the healthy ecocity based on compact, diverse uses—homes, jobs, education, entertainment—all close together. Then we will have a vision of the whole banana, the transforming civilization. Then we will have a clear direction not just for the greenbelt advocates' freezing of the destruction at approximately our present rate, but we will have the beginnings of a scheme for



Left to right, Tim Hansen, Gar Smith, Nancy Lieblich, and Dianne Ayres. All are with Ecocity Builders save Gar of Earth Island Journal. Photo by Richard Register

plus more planted at UA Homes, several at the Berkeley Youth Alternatives Garden, and for several new locations we're lining up, including two more depaving projects, one at Karl Linn Community Garden and one where a parking lot for about fifty cars will be replaced—a big one (see page 3).

I have a lot to be proud of, I can boast. Or can I? Remember that in the meantime, since 1970, it has been 24 years. Meantime California's population has grown by over 50%—and its city land area by over 150%! Perhaps depaving can catch on from such tiny starts. But I doubt if just doing some here and there will amount to much. So far my efforts

withdrawal from disastrous land uses, technologies and life styles all in one strategy. If we are (1) serious about creek and river restoration, if we (2) want to support transit and bicycles, if we (3) need efficient recycling, if we (4) want to save low-income people from having to struggle and squander to pay for the car, if we (5) want a sense of community, and if we (6) want to return nature and agriculture to within a walk or bicycle ride from where we live, then, in most cities this means we will have to rethink, remap, and remodel the whole city, and with it the whole civilization. It isn't happening—yet. But... Put depaving into that context, and we can do it! ❧