



Mohonk Consultations

**“Let’s talk it over at Mohonk.”
A TRADITION OF CONNECTING
PEOPLE THROUGH DIALOGUE**

2021




Before last year, Mohonk Consultations saw the ability to host our public events at our spiritual home, Mohonk Mountain House, as critical to our identity. Technological challenges notwithstanding, the three webinars we presented in 2021 surprised us in ways we couldn't have predicted.

Our online programs exceeded the number of attendees at our in-person events by more than twofold. The diversity of our participants increased in many respects, including socioeconomic, racial, and age range. Although for 40 years our mission has been “to bring together people of diverse perspectives in dialogue,” manifesting that diversity in our audiences has remained one of our largest challenges.

Joining countless other organizations and individuals in this time of pandemic and social unrest, Mohonk Consultations has recommitted to the hard work of broadening our understanding of ourselves and the world around us. While self-work is by necessity uncomfortable at times, the world calls for it urgently, so that we can reconnect to other human beings and nature with more authenticity and generosity of spirit. We must grow, deepen our awareness, broaden our definition of community, and strengthen our intimate connection to all life on Earth.

This work requires great imagination, deep listening and humble expression, and yes, discomfort. It is Mohonk Consultations' mission to stoke the imagination, cultivate open listening, and model gentleness of expression, in the hope that we can all move forward as a better society.

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In January of this year, we listened carefully to Judith Enck, environmental policy advocate and expert on plastic waste. She helped us understand how the emphasis on the individual consumer for cleaning up plastic waste (while important) is a misplaced responsibility, leading only to more marketing schemes targeting wealthy individuals. Meanwhile, the rest of us, especially indigenous communities and communities of color, suffer ever more from catastrophic levels of air, soil, and water pollution. The web of environmental degradation is woven into the web of social hierarchies. Our close listening enabled us to see more clearly the dysfunctional manufacturing system within which we exist.

In February, we listened as Dennis Kucinich, Lester Strong, and Dior Williams helped us imagine better ways of communicating to find “common ground” among differing points of view. We contemplated the power of speech, and recommitted to reflection before speaking rather than impulsive blurting on social media. We explored the idea of listening while maintaining curiosity, rather than rushing to judgement. Rather than the hubris associated with “being right,” we were invited to speak with humility as a way of attracting more listeners. The goal is to soften the boundary between listener and speaker, a nonaggressive way of finding a path through the territory of conflict.

In June, we listened to Black farmers and land conservationists who guided us in rethinking our relationship to plants and people. We journeyed with Rhyston Mays, Alison Espinoza, and Shaniqua Bowden through the physical realm of the painful history regarding Black people and land in this country; then traveled even further back to reclaim Indigenous plant knowledge incorporating sacredness and spirit. Together we leapt forward again to re-imagine a way out of the extractive model that dominates farming, destroys land, and severs the connection between land and people.

Our imaginations stimulated, our ears open, with humility, we invite you to proceed with us, in this time of chaos and possibility, as we expand our ability to pay attention and cultivate our collective “response-ability”.

Giants Outstanding in Their Fields

Remembering Gerow Smiley and Dan Guenther

We honor the lives of two leaders important to the collective welfare of farming, the environment and our local community: Gerow Smiley and Dan Guenther. They died about a week apart last January 24 and February 1, 2021, respectively. While each engaged in separate farming ventures during much of their lives, in 2003 Gerow and Dan partnered to found Brook Farm Project, a community supported agriculture farm (CSA) at the eastern foot of the mountain. For a decade, Brook Farm Project provided produce to many local residents as well as delivering fresh vegetables for use in the Mountain House dining room.



Gerow Smiley

Gerow began farming as a teenager under the tutelage of Mohonk Mountain House (MMH) head farmer, Earl Stokes, at Spring Farm. He helped care for the MMH dairy herd and assisted with growing hay, corn, and oats to feed the resort's horses, sheep, pigs, and cows. In 1951 he went on to become a large animal veterinarian and returned to the mountain where he bred horses for the livery and carriage outfits, continued to work with the dairy herd, and served as personnel director and then on the board of directors for the hotel. On retirement in 1988, he moved to Redlands, California where he kept busy volunteering at the Redlands Community Hospital in the A. K. Smiley Library's adult literacy program, and campaigned in many ecological initiatives. He returned to the mountain several times each year. When at Mohonk he never failed to attend Mohonk Consultations programs. He established an MMH composting system using horse manure and bedding and the MMH food waste. Today the facility continues to produce high-quality compost that fortifies the hotel gardens' soil.



Dan Guenther

In 1983, Dan, his wife Ann, and their family moved to New Paltz, where they annually sprouted and led multiple community-building endeavors, often serving as pioneers in making local social change. All these groundbreaking projects were aimed at increasing the welfare of farms, people and the planet. Dan co-created and continued to mentor numerous farm CSAs at Vassar and in Kingston, Beacon, and New Paltz, including Brook Farm Project. Mohonk Consultations, with Dan, Helen Vukasin and Gayle Greene, founded Phillies Bridge Farm Project in the early 1990s. For more on the founding of this earliest CSA in New Paltz visit philliesbridge.org/about. He, Ann and others also began more trailblazing projects such as the New Paltz Climate Change Coalition, boosting solar energy production and use, and the creation of a regional rail trail system. They often shared a full set of flags of all United Nations member countries, which they gladly loaned for many venues, including the full-day Mohonk Consultations conference: Creating and Sustaining Peace (2019).

“The transformational power of love is extraordinary.”

– Dennis Kucinich

“If there’s anything that our politics needs now, it’s love. There is an underlying unity – we have to evoke that and then build on it, which is what Mohonk Consultations is all about.”



We must acknowledge the extractive culture that we’re all a part of. People of color don’t want to just own land; we want to steward land. We live in a time when corporations have rights. We look at trees, the greens we eat, and the beauty of nature as commodities. This is how we once looked at enslaved people.

– Shaniqua Bowden

Humans have generated 8.3 billion tons of plastic since 1950—half of it in the last 15 years. We still have a fighting chance to stop this. We can’t go product by product, or company by company. We really need systemic change. We need to pass new laws and make sure they are enforced. An example of change at scale is New York State’s plastic bag ban, which will eliminate the disposal of some 23 billion plastic bags per year.

– Judith Enck





We were taken from our land because we were agriculturists. Our people came off the slave ships with seeds braided into their hair. Look at some of our role models in black agriculture: regenerative agriculture, composting, crop rotation are some of the main contributions of George Washington Carver, as are so many agricultural practices in use today.

– **Alison Espinosa**

During an internship with the Poughkeepsie Farm Project, I realized that working in community with the land was the place where I felt most at peace.

– **Rhyston Mays**



The Four Gateways of Speech are: Is it true? Is it kind? Is it timely and clear? Is it beneficial? These four principles are questions to ask ourselves before we speak, and if our thoughts run counter to these principles, we should either modify our thoughts or be silent.

– **Lester Strong**

Never assume that you are so right that you will win an argument – others may feel the same and then no one wins. Listen with curiosity and without sculpting your response.

– **Dior Williams**





The Percussion Orchestra of Kingston (POOK), photo courtesy the Creative Center for Education

On September 19 of this year, Mohonk Consultations celebrated the Center for Creative Education (CCE, cce4me.org) with our 2021 Distinguished Achievement Award. CCE’s mission is “to enrich the social and cultural awareness of our youth and community through arts, wellness, and education.” Dance and music instruction has been at the core of the organization’s mission since its start in 1989, but CCE has continually expanded its innovative programming, enrollment, and community engagement, while advancing support of low-income children and youth. When COVID brought new hardships, the Kingston-based organization rose to the challenge, creating a program to help students and families cope with the closing of schools by providing a safe space, meals, tutoring and access to WiFi for learning.

“CCE has been a reliable, stable refuge for young people and their families to feel safe in expression and increasing their sense of self and strength,” shared a parent from Port Ewen. Along with instructing and nurturing three award-winning youth dance ensembles and the Percussion Orchestra of Kingston, CCE is committed to building a legacy of personal strength, confidence, integrity, intelligence, community support, and creative collaborations in young people in Kingston and well beyond.

We are deeply inspired by CCE’s tremendous contributions to building a strong community and future citizen leaders here in the Hudson Valley. Check our website for video of the event.



Photo courtesy the Creative Center for Education



The purpose of Mohonk Consultations is to bring about a clearer understanding of the interrelationships of all life on earth, emphasize the need for sustainable use of all the earth’s resources, including humans, and support the development of practical means to do so.

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Thank You to our recent donors and partner organizations!

These donations are deeply valued for the ways they support our collective work on behalf of the land, water and people of the Hudson Valley and beyond.

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& Keith Smiley*

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Rondout Valley HighSchool Human Rights Club

Rootworker's Croft

SUNY New Paltz Black Lives Matter at School Coalition

SUNY New Paltz Sustainability Club

Kimberly Stever

New Program Coordinator

We're delighted to announce the appointment of Kimberly Stever last spring as our new program coordinator. She came to us following a five-year stint as benefit coordinator/administrative assistant at the Quogue Wildlife Refuge on Long Island.



Help us create a more resilient Hudson Valley!

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www.mohonk-consultations.org/donation

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For announcements of events coming in late fall and early next year!

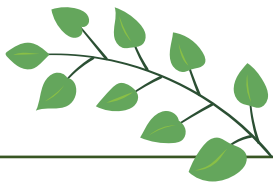
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2021 Fall Conference Update

Drowning in Trash, Reaching for Solutions

Date/Format TBD, due to changing health regulations regarding the Coronavirus, please check your email and/or our website for updates.



2021 UN International Year of Fruits and Vegetables

At its 74th session, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed YEAR 2021 the International Year of Fruits and Vegetables (IYFV). The primary role of the food and the agriculture sector is to adequately feed people by increasing the availability, affordability and consumption of varied, safe and nutritious foods that are in line with dietary recommendations and environmental sustainability. In this way, the IYFV is a unique opportunity to raise awareness on the important role of fruits and vegetables in human nutrition, food security and health and as well in achieving the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

2021