

It's all happening at the Fair

By Michael Hackleman

Looking for a place to learn about renewable energy (RE) and see and touch the hardware? Check out the *The Midwest Renewable Energy and Sustainable Living Fair*, June 22-24, 2001, in Amherst, Wisconsin, hosted by the Midwest Renewable Energy Association (MREA).

I've made the pilgrimage cross country to this event for the past nine years and I always look forward to it. The fact that MREA is celebrating its 12th annual Fair says a lot for its tenacity, popularity, and viability.

Amherst is a small town—within an hour's drive of two major airports—and the Fair has a friendly and a relaxed air to it, but everything else about this event is *big*. In 1999, the

Fair logged 15,500 attendees from 49 states and 40 countries.

What I like most about the Fair is the workshops. There are more than a hundred different ones to choose from during the 3-day event. Topics? Solar and wind electric systems, solar cooking, alternative housing, fuels and transportation, organic gardening, simple living, responsible investments, straw bale construction, masonry stoves, solar space heating, recycling, solar hot water, wind water pumping, garden seed saving, and others. There are 14 workshops running at the *same* time, 5 times a day (6 on Saturday), and 1¼ hours each. Their program guide is a masterpiece of design to aid the attendee in choosing the workshops of choice.



The Fair is held at the Portage County Fairgrounds, just a brief walk from Amherst in the lush countryside so typical of Wisconsin. The MREA has a permanent building at the fairgrounds with a solar-heated radiant floor, wind and solar-generated electricity, and both strawbale and cordwood walls. There are ongoing demonstrations of these technologies all weekend, both at the fair and through bus tours of RE-powered homes in the vicinity.

I love to cruise through the long rows of vendors (there are more than 150 of them), asking questions, and checking for bargains.

Family-based workshops and entertainment abound at the Fair. Children will enjoy the LEGO Village, making recycled art, and learning about the earth—giving parents a chance to pursue their own interests. There's a

wide variety of good, wholesome food available onsite.

The keynote speaker this year is Julia (Butterfly) Hill and the opening address will be given by Paul Watson of Sea Shepard fame.

SolWest

A month after the midwest event, there's the 3rd annual SolWest fair, in John Day, Oregon. Jennifer Barker is the guiding light behind this event and she's done her homework. It is definitely out in the boonies, but it's a great gathering of novice and expert alike, with workshops, displays, demonstrations, tours of RE sites, vendors, dynamic countryside, lots of fresh air, good food, and your choice of camping or motels. The 2000 event even hosted an Electrathon race.

Treat yourself to either event (or both). Maybe I'll see you there. Δ



Energy Fairs

June 22-24: Midwest Renewable Energy Fair

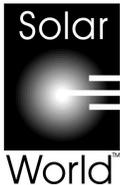
Location: Amherst, Wisconsin
 Address: MREA, 7558 Deer Rd, Custer, WI 54423
 Contact: Katy Matthai
 Phone: 715-592-6595
 E-mail: mreainfo@wi-net.com
 Website: <http://www.the-mrea.org>

July 28-29: SolWest

Address: EO Renew, P.O. Box 485, John Day, OR 97820
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 Website: <http://www.solwest.org>

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