

Voices of the Valley

Working together to save our environment

Recently I attended the annual Skagit Land Trust fundraising auction where some 240 people gathered to raise more than \$50,000 to help conserve land and critical habitat right here in Skagit County. Corporate sponsors from throughout the county and scores of volunteers stepped forward to lend a hand. The event served as a timely reminder that the health of our environment is equally as important as a sound economy. Clearly, people throughout our community are working together to promote the well-being of this special place.

Although Earth has suffered a great deal of damage due to human activities, there's growing interest in a healthy and maintainable environment by a broad diversity of citizens who realize that a healthier natural environment can nurture a more sustainable business environment. Business and industry leaders have long recognized the importance of locating in communities that offer plenty of opportunities for health and outdoor recreation.

As a biologist, I remember well when we would question, what is more important, "nature" or "nurture?" We soon realized that humans need both the gift of



Dr. James M. Ford

genetics as well as a healthy environment in order to develop and flourish. Likewise, a successful and productive economy requires a clean and healthy environment.

My generation made plenty of mistakes because of what we didn't know. We believed that technology and invention could solve everything. Now, we understand that's only one part of the solution. Our planet has been damaged but, thanks to a new generation that understands and appreciates what needs to be done to sustain a healthy world, it may get the tender care it needs.

Locally, many nonprofits are working to improve our environment. I have been involved with three that are working cooperatively to inform and inspire our citizens — including young people — and bringing hope for a more vibrant and healthy Skagit environment. These deeply dedicated groups are Skagit Land Trust, North Cascades Institute, and Friends of the Anacortes Community Forest Lands. They are responsible, well-managed and particularly effective at accomplishing their goals. In doing so, they are meeting an essential need of our community: to conserve and restore Northwest environments — the world my grandchildren, and yours, will inherit. Using sound scientific principles, an inclusive and nonjudgmental approach and powerful experiences in the natural world, these groups are helping

kids and their families see that if we want a healthy, beautiful place to live, work and learn, then we must make careful decisions.

It's important work and these three organizations are doing it well. Although the need is urgent given the breathtaking rate at which the global population is growing, we still have time to make the critical changes we need to make in order to meet this challenge. With the leadership of these dedicated organizations and thousands of volunteers throughout our community, effective strategies can be developed for preserving our environment.

To become part of this positive change, contact these groups or other environmental and conservation groups to learn about how you can help. You and your family will have the satisfaction of knowing you have become part of the solution to this challenge before us. Skagit Land Trust, North Cascades Institute, and Friends of the Forest have great support from our community and are investing it well. But greater support is needed plus ideas, financial contributions, volunteers and, most of all, the morale and ethical courage it will take to save our planet — especially this special corner of the world we call home.

■ Dr. James M. Ford retired as president of Skagit Valley College in 1995. He held that post for 18 of the 41 years he served as a teacher and administrator.