

Lower Columbia Time Bank crew (clockwise): Christopher Paddon, Pearl Rasmussen, Nancy Spaan, Theresa Barnes, Tallie Spiller (on the clock) Caren Black, Joseph Stevenson and Jennifer Rasmussen.

Lower Columbia TIME BANK

By Lynn Hadley

There was a time when we knew everyone in our neighborhoods, and may have even been related to many of them, a happy tribal existence, of sorts. All pitching in when one needed help, and every member filling a need, but in the fast-paced world of today, we barely know our neighbors much less what their needs or skills might be. Often friends, neighbors, and family members can be there to help out, but there are times when no one is available. Any part of our community, separated from family and friends, such as elderly or minority groups, may not have access to the help they need without paying for a service.

Hour-for-hour, you can invest your time in a new community economy

What if there was a way to rebuild a social network that helped people and their communities become more self-sufficient, and placed value and caring on everyday people needs. Voila! People are doing it, and the new system of time banking is working.

A time banking community offers voluntary help and services ranging from babysitting and dog walking to car repair and technical support from the people in your community. Time banking is like having an extended family to help out with rides to the doctor or the grocery store, help with chores around the house, or childcare. Time banking is a community "data-ing" service; a database of willing community members who care to offer their special or simple talents for the opportunity to bank "work hours" for use when they may need a lawn mowed, or help moving a piano.

The concept of time banking originated with founder Edgar Cahn in the 1980s. Time banking is meant to honor the unique talents and skills that all community members have to share, regardless of age, employment, or ethnic background, like teaching language, art, or music, helping with yard work or minor repairs, or simply running errands. By valuing the community as a resource for all its members as human beings with something to contribute, the time bank

builds a rich infrastructure in the form of a community skills and services directory to promote exchanges that work beyond a price. Work value is redefined from what comes in a paycheck to what it takes to raise healthy children, build strong communities, revitalize neighborhoods, and make the planet a more caring and sustainable place.

Time banking brings people together, and turns strangers into friends. Have you ever wished you had someone around to give you a ride somewhere, help you run some errands, pick you up after you drop your car off for repairs, or just give you a hand when you need it? Who has never been stuck needing to move without sufficient strong bodies or, worse, yet, no truck!? Everyone has seen the bumper sticker proclaiming, "Yes, it's my truck, and, no, I won't help you move!" Luckily for the Lower Columbia region, a very different philosophy has been appropriated by an eight person steering committee, who have been working diligently to research and to bring the Lower Columbia Time Bank (LCTB) to the Northwestern Oregon and Southwestern Washington Coasts.

The LCTB steering committee is: Teresa Barnes, LCTB Financial Officer; Jennifer Rasmussen, LCTB Secretary; Pearl Rasmussen, LCTB Membership Coordinator; Tallie Spiller, LCTB



Photo: Dinah Urell

Outreach Director; Caren Black, LCTB Adviser (Titanic Lifeboat Academy); Christopher Paddon, LCTB Supporter (Titanic Lifeboat Academy Board Member); Nancy Spaan, LCTB Supporter (Titanic Lifeboat Academy); Joseph Stevenson, LCTB Supporter, came together initially to find a Time Bank program that existed and could be employed as a template or mentor program. Having difficulty in locating a specific person to help with the set-up, they just dove into it, and, eventually, committee members discovered the Southern Oregon Time Bank (www.sotb.org) from Ashland, which provided a model they were interested in, and offered affordable software to establish the time banking on-line database for postings needs and skills to be exchanged.

For many of the committee members, the prospect of a better world through greater community connections factors prominently into the interest in creating a time bank. LCTB Founding member, Teresa Barnes, not only sees the time bank as the potential to develop a community give-and-take, sharing-based opportunity that functions outside of a strictly monetary system, but as an idea that fits perfectly into Astoria and the outer-lying communities.

"I never witnessed community-in-action until I moved to Astoria. There is already a strong tradition (of helping), here... (The time bank) arises out of a direct need from the community and sells itself." Theresa is excited to share her skills, as well as her friends' talents with the community. "Knowing that you can help each other out empowers a neighborhood". She has already been approached by neighbors expressing their interest in the whole time bank idea. Teresa has

been a resident of Astoria for the last ten years.

The hours earned or exchanged in a time bank are all of equal value, respecting each participant as an asset with something to offer the community, and accepting the fact that we need each other to build stronger communities. The cur-

What is time banking?

Time banking is a tool by which a group of people can create an alternative model where they exchange their time and skills, rather than acquire goods and services through the use of money or any other state-backed value.

rent state of the economy makes this an opportune time to engage this "missing piece" to help with the political and economic future of the Pacific Northwest, commented LCTB supporter, Nancy Spaan. As the current economic system does not seem to benefit the general population, according to LCTB Adviser, Christopher Paddon, time banks offer people their own economy by enabling communities to be more neighborly and to put into action, the concept of reclaiming community economics. Time banks serve as a tool for creating the community

"Health organizations believe time banks make people feel better, and cut the cost of health care . . . while some forms of barter are taxable, the I.R.S. has ruled that time dollars are not — because they value all work equally, work is done for a charitable purpose, and the exchange is informal and non-contractual."

- New York Times (September 20, 2011)

that works for you, transforming communities into neighborhoods we want to live in versus communities we feel stuck in.

Caren Black of the Titanic Lifeboat Academy serves a very important role as adviser and mentor to the youthful and energetic LCTB volunteer staff. The academy provided the 501c3 wing to the Lower Columbia Time Bank, under which it has been allowed to fly. Raised in the mid-

west, Caren embraces the childhood memory of an era when neighbors helped one another in times of need. She recalls how communities valued and respected their citizens, based on what they would contribute to one another and the community, and not on their professional training, number of degrees, or

salary. Having grown up in and returning to Astoria after college, LCTB founding member, Pearl Rasmussen, felt a tremendous sense of community in Astoria after big storms hit the region. "Sometimes it takes a disaster for people to see what they're capable of." In the face of economic disaster, the time bank offers an appropriate response to helping each other. Pearl's vision of the time bank operations builds bridges, and opens conversations between different parts of the community. In

speaking with various community groups and encouraging participation, she has been able to make people aware of the skills they have to offer in a time bank exchange: reading a book to someone; speaking English with non-native speakers; helping with basic chores or repairs. The time bank serves as a "powerful tool for many community members to build self-esteem. It's nice to have a conversation with people

and see them sit-up a little straighter when they realize they all have skills to share." Fellow LCTB founding member, Jennifer Rasmussen (no relation to Pearl) wants to support "cool things (happening) in my neighborhood, exchanging help, instead of money makes you a better neighbor."

LCTB Outreach Director, Tallie Spiller appreciates a key tenet of time banking in the equal value placed in all work hours; everyone's hour is equal to everyone else's hour. "To give something that you want to give

and then to be able to receive what you need is a really exciting idea." Talking with different parts of the community, Tallie shares the concept and practice of time banking, "everyone sees how they can fit themselves into it." The time bank benefits come from getting to know and to share with new people, and to become a bigger part of the community as a resource.

The LCTB staff is eager to initiate and to maintain the formation of LCTB; they stress the importance of flexibility in the growth and future of LCTB and

its possible off-shoot time banks. LCTB, in its current form, desires to reach the communities all up and down the river, serving Southwestern Washington (Pacific and Wahkiakum Counties

), and Northwestern Oregon (Clatsop, Columbia, and Tillamook Counties).

How it's going to Work.

The launch date for the Lower Columbia Time Bank community tool is March 20, 2012. At which time the LCTB website, www.locotimebank.org, should be accessible for applications for membership, more information, and an orientation schedule.

LCTB plans to make applications and membership available to those who are not on-line via telephone and postal mail. Applications are to be reviewed by the LCTB staff, and prior to participation, a quick and easy orientation is required to facilitate the use of the program. Completion of the orientation gains new members three time bank hours to start the exchange process. The time bank database allows participants to locate other time bank members' "offers" and "requests" in their area to facilitate an exchange. Members make their own exchanges and report their own hours. Hours can not be swapped, sold, assigned a value, or given away. There are no membership fees and all exchanges are informal and voluntary. The all-volunteer LCTB staff is seeking technical assistance with the on-line software (Joomla!) and website.

For more specifics on time banking, prior to the launch date contact LCTB at lowercolumbiatimebank@gmail.com, or call (503)298-6709.



Sample Labor Note

A sample labor for labor note for the Cincinnati Time Store. From *Equitable Commerce* by Josiah Warren (1846)

Time Bank going back in time

Time banking is not barter. Barter economies have been in practice throughout history, but the idea of using time as a unit of exchange only appeared shortly after the Industrial Revolution. The origins of time-based currency can be traced both to the American anarchist Josiah Warren, who ran the Cincinnati Time Store from 1827 until 1830, and to the British industrialist and philanthropist Robert Owen, who founded the utopian "New Harmony" community. While both systems are based on the principles of mutualism and the labor theory of value, Josiah Warren's currency was explicitly pegged to time as a measure of specific goods or labor. For example, 3 hours of carpenter's work would be considered equivalent to 3-12 pounds of corn. Meanwhile, Robert Owen's currency simply bore an inscription referring to a number of hours, which presumably could be exchanged for however many pounds of corn a farmer would deem adequate or labor of any kind.

The first successful contemporary time bank was started in 1991 by Paul Glover in Ithaca, New York. Following his idea, people began to exchange time, which led to the creation of a time-based currency—the "Ithaca Hours," which even local businesses began to accept, and which still flourishes. Time banking and service exchange have since developed into a full-fledged movement, usually centered around local communities.