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THE MAGAZINE FOR CREATING SUSTAINABLE ENTERPRISES & COMMUNITIES

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CONFERENCE OUTLINES VISION FOR 21ST CENTURY ECONOMY

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BALLE BEAT

Todd Mills

FROM May 31-June 2, 2007, BALLE hosted its 5th Annual Conference on the University of California's Berkeley campus. California is rapidly becoming a model of what is possible in the coming decades as businesses, governments, and communities begin to define a future based on the principles of Local Living Economies. We are up to 11 local networks in California now, in communities from the small rural town of Willits to the big city of San Francisco to the entire counties of Santa Cruz, Sonoma, and San Benito. One network, the Sierra Business Council, covers 14 counties up and down the Sierra Nevada range.

This year's conference outlined a new direction for people around the world working to strengthen the economic, environmental, and social fabric of their communities. Entrepreneurs showed how they are taking the lead to address root causes of global warming.

What will our economy look like over the next ten years? Entrepreneurs and leaders discussed emerging business opportunities in: Growing local food systems and sustainable agriculture; Distributed solutions for renewable energy; Green building and design; Zero-waste manufacturing and green jobs; Downtown retail and sustainable cities; Community capital; and many other sectors.

B Corporation

How can companies that want to shine brightly in an increasingly green marketplace make their mark? How can consumers and investors make sound decisions that differentiate between good companies and good marketing? How can companies achieve profit, scale, and liquidity while caring for employees, communities, and environment?

Jay Coen Gilbert and Bart Houlahan debuted their nonprofit venture to create the B Corporation, which institutionalizes stakeholder interests through amended corporate

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charters, rates companies' social and environmental performance, and makes it easier for consumers and investors to identify and support "good" companies.

Corporation 20/20

What kind of corporate forms will meet 21st century needs and expectations? And how do we foster the organizational transformation needed to realize such forms? How can great companies (that want to be great citizens) overcome the legal mandate to maximize shareholder returns that forces entrepreneurs to set aside their values?

Debates surrounding the future of the corporation typically are defined as stark choices between government regulation and free markets. Corporation 20/20 posits a third path: system redesign. It is a path that recognizes the historical and legitimate public role in corporate design, the necessity of respecting universal values while recognizing the drawbacks of overly intrusive government, and the creative potential but inherent limitations of voluntarism and unfettered markets. Reaching beyond mainstream corporate social responsibility (CSR), Corporation 20/20 charts a path that embeds social purpose in the organizational "genetics" of corporate structure while helping to build high-performing organizations.

Wiser Business

Great ideas . . . share or hoard? Wiser Business says share. What are the most innovative opportunities out there to advance efforts toward sustainability? What models exist for taking a business from solid to sensational while maintaining the values that allow our communities to thrive?

Wiser Business presented its collaboratively written free-content site of socially and environmentally responsible business resources, encompassing best practices, resources and organizations, industry evaluations, and company assessments. By tapping into the combined knowledge of the Internet community, Wiser Business standardizes what we think of as responsible business behavior, links customers' social and environmental priorities directly to companies, and supplies companies with the latest solutions.

Todd Mills is a network coordinator for the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE), based in San Francisco, California. BALLE connects business networks across North America improving the social, environmental, and economic life of their communities. Visit BALLE's website at www.livingeconomies.org.

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