

# Environmental Cassandras

By Don Lein

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of the 20th century was the banning of DDT. Rachel Carson, on the basis of incomplete science at best, convinced environmental zealots and some politicians that DDT was harmful to the environment and life on earth. Although the Sweeney Committee stated in April 25, 1972, "DDT is not a carcinogenic hazard to man," Ruckelshaus of the EPA banned it two months later labeling it a "carcinogenic risk." Not only was it banned in the U. S., foreign aid was prohibited to countries that used it. The World Health Organization several years ago lifted the ban on its use. In between the hype of the ban and the reality of 30 years later, 50 million needless deaths have occurred.

Scientists, when speaking contemporaneously of the nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, had predicted that nothing would grow in those devastated areas for the following 75 years, but melons grew the next year. In the 1970s and 1980s scientists revisited the effects of nuclear

## OPINION



explosions. In 1975 the National Academy of Sciences concluded in a report that the effect of dust from nuclear blasts to be relatively minor. In 1979, the Office of Technology Assessment stated that nuclear war could produce perhaps irreversible adverse consequences on the environment, however since scientific processes were so poorly understood, it concluded it was not possible to estimate the magnitude of such damage. Shortly thereafter Carl Sagan, astronomer and PBS personality, and

associates published a paper entitled "Nuclear Winter: Global Consequences of Multiple Nuclear Explosions"

Although there was no scientific data presented to refute the OTA's findings, Sagan was very well prepared to support his catastrophic conclusions with a well orchestrated media campaign. He announced "Nuclear Winter" in an article in Parade magazine. Sagan and Paul Ehrlich, author of "The Population Bomb," chaired a conference in Washington, DC, on the long-term consequences of nuclear war.

Ehrlich and Sagan appeared on the Johnny Carson show, 25 and 40 times respectively selling their "science".

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Midtown Dickens, a Durham band, performs on Shakori Hill's Grove Stage.

PHOTO BY KEVIN M. JAMES

## SHAKORI

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great handful of local acts and, despite said rain, a loyal following. Puryear was joined by Clarissa Farrell, a fellow New Yorker, who has since then helped him to coordinate the festival. By the end of the second spring festival, with not much money in the bank but a good feeling for inspiration, the organizers decided to start a fall festival too.

Slow and steady went the work and the growth, with a great crop of supporters and volunteers who believed in what was happening. They set goals which included eventually raising money to buy the farm (which Michener since had sold to another local resident), and building a place where that "festival feeling" of community, bonding through the arts, and progressive education could happen year round. This also included enhancing the grounds and making the site available to community organizations and non-profits for retreats, weddings and fundraisers.

There has been no shortage of obstacles along the road. The fall of 2006 was a difficult one for the festival, the cold and rain of fall wreaking havoc on festival-goers and creating a huge drop in ticket sales. Hope runs rampant among Shakori Hills people

though, and with the help of generous donors and again the knowledge that there was too much good at stake to just give in. By spring 2007's festival, acts like Woodstock veteran Richie Havens and hip hop stars Arrested Development took the stage, no rain fell, and the festival was back with crowds close to 8,000 strong!

The years have passed quickly, and with two festivals a year, everyone stays busy. The spring festival still pulls more people than the fall one, but each season's festival now grows by at least 10 percent from the one before it. "It's amazing how far it's come, and honestly, the thing I continue to be amazed by is the community there in NC and their willingness to be involved and embrace of the festival," says Farrell. Puryear, in a talk before the final act at this past fall's festival, spoke of the importance of keeping the festival safe and inspirational for the youth in the area. These children will become our future, and Shakori Hills is a place for them to grow up with peaceful and community values.

The festival coordinators have a lot of which to be proud, and lots of work to do. One of their missions is to make the festival site fully solar powered. It is a project they are working on with The Abundance Foundation ([www.abundancefoundation.org](http://www.abundancefoundation.org)), a local environmental group. They take public donations, and sell individual solar cells so that each buyer can become a part of the festival. There is also the Hopes and Dreams program, where artists involved with the festival visit with students at nearby schools, emphasizing Shakori Hills's focus on children, families, and arts education.

Rain and cold temperatures are a threat, but when you operate an outdoor event, weather is not something you can do a thing about. What we do have on our side is the loyalty and trust of our patrons, neighbors, and volunteers. Four-day passes sell by the hundreds before the lineup is even released. That means that the grass-roots system is working. It means that a dream has been recognized, and that what happens on a 75-acre farm in Chatham is something very special. So even if there are clouds in the sky next spring, it's well worth the trip.

Earlybird tickets (priced \$30 below gate price) will go on sale this month, so please visit [www.shakorihills.org](http://www.shakorihills.org).

Sara Waters lives in Durham and graduated from UNC-Chapel Hill. She is co-coordinator and publicist for the Shakori Hills GrassRoots festival.

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