

eyewitness

BY PAMELA POLSTON TAKING NOTE OF VISUAL VERMONT

IMAGE: ANDRE MORGANTE



ARCHITECT'S
RENDERING
OF THE FUTURE
BURLINGTON
EARTH CLOCK

Rock Show

Burlington Earth Clock groundbreaking, Blanchard Beach, Burlington. Saturday, October 8, 5 p.m. Free and open to the public. Slide presentation by Dr. Patrick McManaway, November 5, location and time TBA.

Circles for Peace is seeking donations to help support the Burlington Earth Clock. Make checks to PJCVT/Circles for Peace and mail to P.O. Box 5573, Burlington, VT 05402-5573. <http://www.circlesforpeace.org>

If you've ever walked in the woods, hiked a mountain, watched a sunset or nurtured a garden, you've enjoyed firsthand the beauty and wonder of nature. And part of that enjoyment is a sense of peacefulness and grounding. To close observers, the earth itself seems to give off a kind of energy — some places more than others. Even the least “new-agey” among us can buy this. Yet many modern minds remain baffled by the evidently nature-centered standing-stone sites, the most famous being Stonehenge: Why — and how — did our forebears, some 3000 years B.C., arrange mega-ton rocks to create what appears to be a giant clock? What was the point of marking the movement of the sun throughout the year? And, aside from astronomical clues, what did Neolithic man get from standing with the stones?

Circles for Peace has a few answers. The Burlington-based nonprofit, along with the city's Parks and Recreation Department, will soon offer residents an opportunity to go back in time — or keep track of time — with its very own standing-stone circle. Call it neo-Neolithic. On Saturday, October 8, Circles of Peace invites the public to a groundbreaking ceremony for the Burlington Earth Clock, to be sited at Blanchard Beach along the Bike Path near Oakledge Park.

With an unobstructed view across Lake Champlain to the Adirondacks, the site is ideal for marking the changing seasons, suggests member David Brizendine. “With the five western stones, you'll be able to catch the eight days,” he says, referring to the winter and summer solstices, spring and fall equinoxes and four cross-quarter days. “You'll see the sun at the top of each stone.”

The remaining seven will complete the circle, which will be 43.5 feet in diameter. A flat stone in the center will mark where a person should stand to see the sun setting over the stones. These will be about 5 feet, 7 inches tall and weigh at least 3 tons each. The Rock of Ages Quarry in Barre and another site in New York State are donating stones

for the project. Landscape architect Andrea Morgante is donating her time for the design. In addition to the stone circle, the site will include benches, two information displays and some small trees and shrubs to “create a visual break from the oil tanks” behind the site, explains Brizendine.

A Burlington graphic designer and longtime student of standing-stone construction, Brizendine is one of eight members of the Circles for Peace Board and Design Team. Another, Dr. Patrick McManaway, will preside over this Saturday's groundbreaking. From the flat stone positioned at the center of the circle-to-be, he'll take measurements for the placement of the standing stones “based on astronomical considerations,” he says of a process that also involves something called a “megalithic yard.”

geomancer. His Shelburne practice, Whole Earth Geomancy, examines earth energies and other factors to treat “sick buildings” as well as individuals. McManaway divides his time between Vermont and his native Scotland, where he helps run a natural healing center founded by his father. He is also the president of the British Society of Dowzers and teaches dowsing, “earth-acupuncture” and the construction of sacred sites.

All of which is to say that McManaway brings serious earth-energy savvy to Circles for Peace. So does fellow member Ivan MacBeth, an Englishman, modern-day Druid and prominent stone-circle builder. He also spends time on both sides of the Atlantic, and will weigh in when the heavy lifting begins next year on the Burlington Earth Clock. Between now and then,

detect that energy? “All kinds of things,” Parker says. “The influence may be topographical; you're walking down a hill and come to a flat area, and everything about it says, ‘Stop and look around you. Take note of your surroundings.’ Or sometimes,” Parker continues, “you feel energy flowing through a location. If you stand on it, it's like feeling a breeze, but it's not moving air, it's a moving current. You can move stones to contain that energy so that a group can feel it.”

The Burlington Earth Clock is “way more ambitious than anything I've ever done,” Parker says. “It's hard to tell how the public will respond, but I couldn't think of a better city than Burlington to put it in.”

The Queen City has responded positively in what Brizendine says has been

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DR. PATRICK MCMANAWAY

The math may be arcane, but the uses for the resulting stone circle — which should begin construction around May or June 2006 — can be practical. It's up to individual visitors and their “quality of consciousness,” McManaway says. “We hope to create a space for centering and reconnecting people with themselves and their natural environment,” he adds. But McManaway deflects the notion that there is just one proper way to approach a standing-stone site, or labyrinth, or any manmade “sacred” location. While some may use them to enhance meditation or a spiritual practice, anything from doing tai chi or flying kites, to wedding ceremonies or other rites of passage are appropriate, he suggests.

Trained in both holistic healing modalities and mainstream Western medicine, McManaway is now a full-time

McManaway will double-check his computer-calculated measurements against the sun's movement, and Circles for Peace will be fundraising in support of the Burlington Earth Clock project.

Brizendine explains that several of the group's members met each other over the past decade in stone-circle workshops. Some of those took place in North Danville on an 800-acre tree farm owned by Steve Parker. His own interest in earth energies developed over the years because, Parker says, “I noticed that different places feel different . . . What we've tried to do is identify those places on the landscape that have a feel, or energy, to them, and to in some way enhance or intensify that energy to make it into a place that people find attractive.”

What does it feel like when you

a three-year process. So far, Parks & Rec recommended the site and permitted the project, and the South End Neighborhood Planning Assembly gave it a thumbs-up.

Spiritual considerations aside, visitors to the standing-stone site will at least find it a spectacular public art installation with an equally grand view — particularly on those days when the setting sun strikes the tops of the stones. “I think it inspires us to contemplate the awe and mystery of being, really,” suggests McManaway. “It's a way to reconnect back to the seasons, to come back into rhythm, especially for those with office jobs.”

Perhaps it is one of the world's ironies that if you stop running in circles and step inside one, you might feel a whole lot better. ☺