

From page 75...

others, like the Czech mycologists who chose not to return to their homeland in defiance of their government and stayed in Canada to build new careers in British Columbia. Or the lichenologist who overcame severe depression, now lives and studies in park-like seclusion, and says, "news to me is where the snowline on the mountain is today". Both character sketches come as a welcome relief when my interest starts to fade with the less captivating

government employees and academics who carry the narrative for ecological-scale stories.

Although all of the people, species and ecosystems are in British Columbia, the processes described happen globally and shouldn't stop anyone anywhere from getting something out of this book, philosophically, historically or scientifically.

Ultimately, Luther opines that, "Unable to see the processes of nature

at work in our daily context we will stop recognizing these processes. Eventually we will stop valuing them." The converse is also true: when we understand and recognize the processes of nature at work, we will value them and become engaged. **AJ**

Cheryl Hendrickson is a consulting biogeographer who lives in Alberta's boundary layer of foothills. She is a long-ago managing editor of **AJ**.

75 YEARS OF FIGHTING

Community Vitality: From Adaptation to Transformation

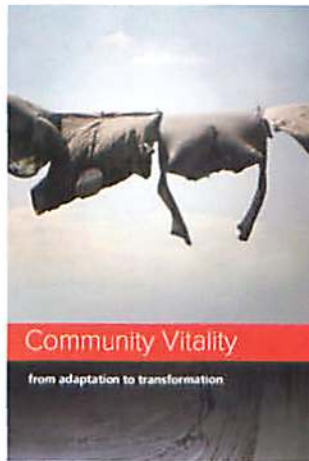
Ann Dale, Rebecca Foon, Yuill Herbert and Rob Newell

Reviewed by SALLY LERNER

AJ readers are familiar, perhaps to the point of saturation, with the discourse around sustainability. Community Vitality is a valuable addition to the conversation primarily because it explores the myriad connections among the environmental, social and governance aspects of sustainability.

"Vital communities are characterized by strong, active and inclusive relationships between residents, private sector, public sector and civil society organizations that work to foster individual and collective wellbeing. Vital communities are those that are able to cultivate and marshal these relationships in order to create, adapt and thrive in the changing world and thus improve well-being of citizens." (7)

What makes the difference between surviving and thriving? In 2009, respected academic Dr. Ann Dale (Royal Roads University) asked her research team to explore the notion of community vitality, seen as a key concept underlying the question of why



"some communities are resilient, adaptive and innovative in the face of change and others are not?" (1). The aim of this accessible book is to "translate" such research into a straightforward yet sophisticated primer for anyone interested in that question.

Each community has its own unique set of values, problems and goals. Community Vitality offers a conceptual framework that allows people in very different places to begin discussing how to map their community's path to satisfying sustainable living. There is no cookie-cutter model here. One of the book's central points is the necessary role of 'homegrown' participatory governance in designing for and achieving community vitality.

"Part of the transition to new forms of governance is expanding the base of decision-makers to allow for ongoing discussion – essentially expanding what we define as government and

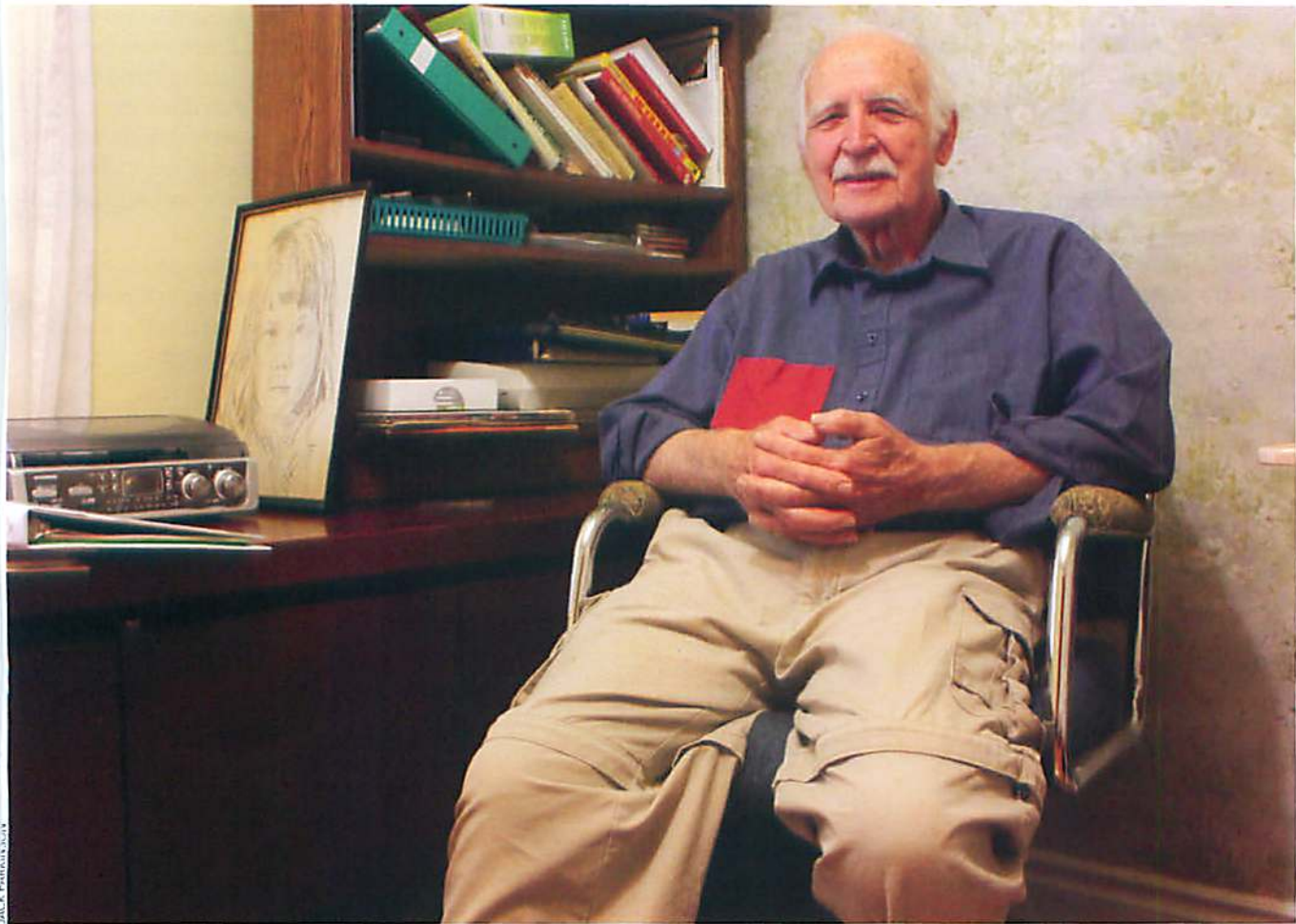
governance. This requires a move from traditional consultation to dialogues, where governments are mandated to educate people as well as solicit feedback on existing and new government policies and programs. Fundamental to expanded decision-contexts are principles of participation, both face-to-face and virtual." (81)

To meet the varied 'wellness' needs of the elderly, children, youth and a variety of other groups, consideration must be given to creating the all-important social capital that underpins quality of life in any community. The evidence-based research summarized in many of the book's chapters calls attention to the need for integrated thinking that clarifies the links between the built environment, green spaces and human contact. For example, parks are (usually) good, but how can they be made more welcoming for parents and toddlers, for walkers seeking company or peaceful solitude? It is the answers to these kinds of questions that must come from all of the people who live in any particular community.

This compact, well-researched book suggests coherent ways of thinking about how to develop thriving sustainable communities as well as renovate existing ones. As such, it is a valuable contribution to the contemporary sustainability conversation. **AJ**

Sally Lerner is professor emerita at the Faculty of Environment, uWaterloo.





Matt Foster in his home in Cambridge, Ontario.

Going to work was like working on a hobby you loved," Foster recalls.

As part of his work, he travelled internationally to see the newest technology and techniques for poultry incubation. Foster's travels took him to China, India, and many countries in Europe.

"China had just opened up – everyone was still wearing their Mao suits."

While in India and China, Foster could not help but notice how poverty-stricken some places were. He would walk by people whose shelter was a plastic bag stretched across two sticks in the ground, then go back to his marble-floored hotel.

Something had to change.

Foster initially founded the group with some of friends and colleagues, to modest initial success – most notably the hosting of Dutch professor Paul Lucardie during the early 1990s for a series of speeches in Cambridge and

other Ontario towns about proportional representation, a topic back in the news today. Foster was able to accomplish this as a gesture of faith from one nation to another, and there were many other, smaller community events in Cambridge where Civis Mundi has a presence.

While I would like to say the future looks bright for Civis Mundi, as we move into an age of global information and communication, that would not honestly be the truth. Foster is aware of the elephant in the room: given the sheer scale of what Foster wanted to do, progress is tough to measure and even tougher to make.

"At my age, if I write to university papers, I'm ignored," said Foster.

"If I write to environmental groups, they're swamped. There is seldom a chance for conversation."

And there is the matter of Foster's age; he's no spring chicken anymore. Civis Mundi's website ([civismundi](http://civismundi.com).

[civismundi](http://civismundi.com)) could use an update. Frankly, he could use some help ensuring his vision of world citizenship and an aware global population is seen by more – which may be more likely than you'd think, given how much the millennial generation prioritizes global communication and citizenship.

The difference one man or woman makes is more than likely going to be felt by people in that person's community rather than around the world – so doesn't that make the whole idea a wash?

But, then again, that's all Civis Mundi wanted to do: encourage global citizens who are making positive change. If that happens to be on a community centre stage instead of the world stage, so be it. **AVJ**

Jack Parkinson is a graduate of Conestoga College's print journalism program and is an editorial intern with AVJ.