



Free to breathe and thrive

By Bianca Ballara, March 9th 2020

At the heart of Beyond Toxics is the aspiration that all Oregonians live in a thriving landscape whereby they may drink pure, clean water and breathe clear air and be nourished from clean, living soils.

For us, water is more than an eight-glass daily prescription. Water is the most fundamental component of our well-being. It connects us to the past, to the future and to every living being in the web of life.

Water enters our bodies as energizing hydration and exits our bodies as cleansing relief.

In the echoing words of Grandma Agnes Baker Parker, a recent elder of the local Takelma Tribe and treasure of people worldwide, "All humans came from water in the amniotic sac of our mother's womb and that Water is our first medicine. We are to take care of it and guard it. Not just for now but for seven generations to come in the unborn."

Our relationship is the same with air. On average, every human alive pulls into themselves 12 generous breaths every minute. Those oxygen molecules are the same that sustained your great grandparents.

Water and air are intimate with every one of us moving from resources outside of our bodies to cellular exchange deep within. We are united by their benefit.

In this, we are so very similar with every thriving and living organism. We are provided for in an exchange of reciprocity with these timeless elements. It is no

wonder they are honored and blessed across countless ancient cultures, from the Lakota to the Druids, from the Yoruba to Buddhists.

Because waters, airs and soils travel the world, wise ones speak good thoughts and wishes into them and spread well-being and good fortune.

We at Beyond Toxics hope that we are continually learning from these earth-based cultures. When we protect our Oregon waters and airs, we hope that we are spreading good wishes for well-being across our diverse communities.

At this time in our valley, the dominant pollution exist in the poorest neighborhoods, expose those in the lowest-income jobs and affect disproportionately higher numbers of indigenous and communities of color. From the eyes of the privileged, they may be relatively hidden. But from affected eyes, contamination of our precious waters and air, and communities, are in plain sight. Harmony will come as we attend to this difference.

Born of our collaboration with Unete Center for Farmworker Advocacy in Medford and NAACP-Lane County, we have formed "LOCAL": Liberation of Community and Land to serve the indigenous and communities of color of Oregon by encouraging an environmental justice movement by and for our diverse people. This in turn serves the broader community by amplifying the deep wisdom of our distinctive ancestors' effective relationships to land.

We come together because we are stronger, more visible and more supported in shifting our Southern Oregon culture to one that celebrates diversity in our community and offers environmental solutions that work for all and not just some. During this time of big environmental changes, we need big visions, justice for all and a multiplicity of perspectives.

Broader is our vision of a Non Toxic Southern Oregon already underway with the help of passionate community members. Non Toxic Southern Oregon is an intention to see all public spaces — such as municipal parks, public lawns, public right-of-ways, school parks as well as the roadsides that surround our homes and gardens — using organic first land management.

With the growing acceptance of scientific research showing the harmful effects of toxic chemicals on human, pollinator and salmon health and the available resources for organic methods, we at Beyond Toxics are working for new ways forward for our cities and counties with alternative solutions so that we can view pesticides as artifacts of the past.

Beyond Toxics wishes to be an inspiration for well-being and peace by honoring the high value water, air and soil have within all of our lives.

Whether human, plant or animal, these elements are at the center of what we need for good health, nourishment, and the basic ability to live thriving, self-determined lives. Until all of us can breathe easily, drink fully and pray, learn and work in well-respected and well-stewarded landscapes, we will be encouraging all of our communities to speak, unite and rise. In this way we contribute to the foundation of the Culture of Peace.

Bianca Ballara is an Environmental Justice community organizer for Beyond Toxics (beyondtoxics.org) and the LOCAL project and is a first-generation Latinx.