

Body, Mind & Spirit

Responsible Wealth Trickle Down?

BY DONELLA H. MEADOWS

The other day a friend sent me a brochure put out by an organization called Responsible Wealth. I could hardly believe the name. Reading on, I could hardly believe what it stands for.

"We are business leaders and wealthy individuals, among the top five percent of income earners and asset holders in the U.S.," the brochure leads off. "We are concerned about

the rise in power of large corporations and the growing gap between the rich and everyone else."

Twenty years ago, says the brochure, the richest one percent of the U.S. population owned 19 percent of all private wealth. Now the top one percent owns almost 40 percent - more than the bottom 92 percent of us combined.

The Reagan regime of the 1980's cut the taxes of corporations and the wealthy and promised that their gains would trickle down into investments and jobs. The money trickled up instead.

The folks behind Responsible Wealth see themselves as beneficiaries of a game with unfair rules. "We recognize that assets play an essential role in building wealth and prosperity. However, we believe there is an overemphasis on the rights and rewards of private capital are

able to pass on fortunes and multiply our wealth through passive investing, while around us one in four children are born into poverty."

"We believe that in a healthy economy workers should earn fair compensation and all citizens should have the opportunity to earn, save, and be economically secure. We believe that civil rights and economic rights are inseparable; we will never have one without the other."

"We believe that economic inequality and the scapegoating of welfare recipients and immigrants are dividing our nation and undermining our collective sense of community. By continuing to separate ourselves economically, we are contributing to a society in which people at one end of the spectrum are walled off in gated communities while many at the other end are behind bars."

What does Responsible Wealth propose to do? In essence, lobby for policies that we who are not rich never expect to hear the rich promote - tax increases for the wealthy and dramatic campaign finance reform.

For more information about Responsible Wealth, contact United for a Fair Economy at 37 Temple Place, Fifth Floor, Boston, MA 02111 (617) 423-2148 or e-mail them at rw@stw.org

Turning Employees Into Business Owners

INTERVIEW BY JOY RAMOS

Burley Design Cooperative was ranked this year as the 4th "Best Place to Work in Oregon" by the Oregon Business Journal. The company produces bicycles and bike-related products. They are an internationally renown, multi-million dollar business.

Burley Design Cooperative is part of an emerging culture of innovative and socially responsible businesses in America. The interview was with Greg Guenther, the General Manager of the company.

Q: What makes your company so dynamically different?

Greg Guenther: This is our 20th year anniversary as a worker-owner manufacturing Cooperative. We have about 100 members and run our business as a democratic process by treating each other as equals and making business decisions together. Each of us is a worker. Each of us is an owner.

Burley Design takes its profits and divides it equally among its workers. At the end of the year, we pool the profits and use a formula based on how many hours we worked. Each worker receives a bonus in the form of an hourly bonus.

Q: How is it a worker-owner exist?

Greg Guenther: There's a huge degree of freedom here. Workers choose their own hours, set up their own work stations. They have many challenges of having to be involved in the long term direction of the business.

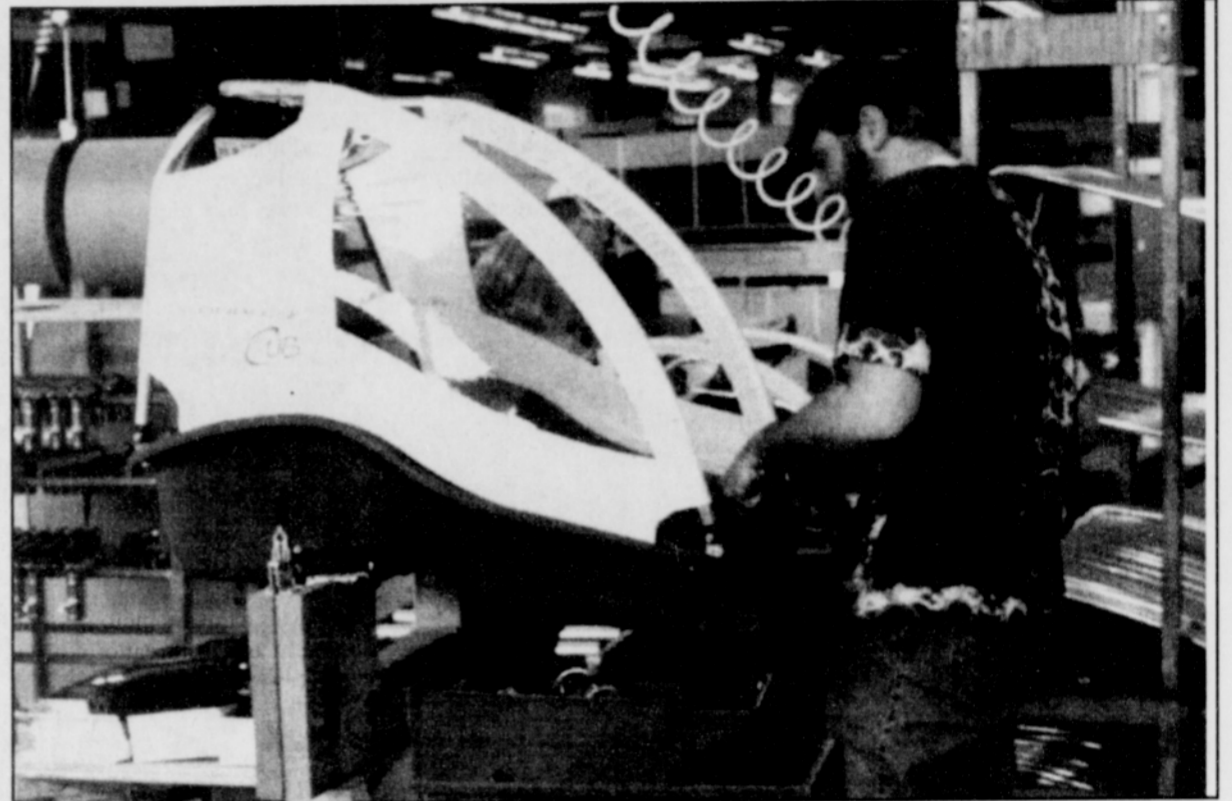
This isn't just a paycheck for us, this is our livelihood and hopefully our children's livelihood. The goal is to really help sustain the organization for the future generation of people working here, not maximizing immediate dollars.

We all don't punch in and out as workers. Sometimes we are Managers, sometimes we are Directors.

There's a huge degree of empowerment given to the workers. We expect each individual to take full control of their workplace, each team to take full responsibility for its collective actions.

Q: How is company support for each other shown?

Greg Guenther: We allow individual workers to get involved in the community in their own way. One of the ways is letting them set their own schedule to take time off to volunteer or go to their children's school and hang out with their kids. There's never a question 'I want to do something for the community. Do I need to ask for time off for it?' It's not a necessity.



A Burley Design workstation.

We offer benefits to domestic partners. You don't have to be married or involved in a relationship of traditional marriage to receive benefits. We pay health care for people who have shown a commitment to each other who may not be married by law.

Q: I understand that the workers are the Board of Directors who choose their Managers. How's the company management style different?

Greg Guenther: Managers try to represent the voice of their team members. I see the Managers more as a coach/facilitator rather than a conflict-resolution person. We have trained mediators that are our workers to help resolve differences.

To be terminated from the company takes a vote of the entire membership (about 100 people). It's not up to the Manager to say. It's up to the group with a 3/4 vote to say 'OK, it's time to change.'

Q: How is your company socially responsible?

Greg Guenther: We are an active contributor to shelter and hunger needs. We give 1% of our profits to organizations that really give directly to our local community.

Q: How is your business environmentally responsible?

Greg Guenther: We built a new building two years ago that won an International Award for its environmentally conscious design.

We use as much natural light as possible and have placed a lower horse-power motor on the elevator. The workspace was designed so that air would move in more freely and

there's maximum natural light. We use solar reflectors to bring in more light into the building. We have motion detectors for turning on/off lights when no one is in the workspace.

We've designed our building to achieve our mission of environmental consciousness. And, we're really aggressive recyclers here.

Q: As a Cooperative, what values make up most Co-op companies?

Greg Guenther: Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help,

self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honest openness, social responsibility, and caring for others. If you are interested in making your company a Cooperative, contact Greg Guenther by phone at (541) 687-1644 or e-mail burley@aol.com. Another resource is the Northwest Cooperative Federation in Seattle, WA. Call (206) 632-4559.

The Sky's The Limit



Dain Jaechs started his own business called Galore Paging at the young age of 22. His entrepreneurial spirit helped turn 13 Galore Paging employees into successful business owners. After five years in business, he continues to lead the paging market with innovation and will introduce the concept of networking with pagers in the near future. His company is socially responsible by sponsoring and donating money to community events and plans on giving space in his company for public voting.

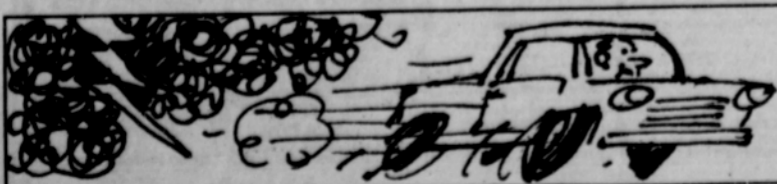
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II Peter 2:19b

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