

EcoTeams gather to enjoy life more with less

People such as the Mulberry Ladies are sowing the seeds of environmental consciousness in their neighborhoods

By Wade Nkrumah
The Oregonian staff

They call themselves Mulberry Ladies Society of High Density Earth Dwellers.

Friends, family and others in their lives know them simply as Karen Bewley, Delores Hankins, Amber McLellan, Tammy Munro-Reyes, Maren Souders and Sharlyn Thacker.

The names haven't changed since the six Southeast Portland women started meeting periodically the past four months, but their lives at home have changed.

Working independently but drawing support as a collective whole, the Mulberry Ladies are one of several dozen EcoTeams taking root and sprouting throughout the city, mostly in Southeast.

The Mulberry Ladies, like others who have embraced EcoTeam ideals, are learning and refining ways to live less excessively.

They're doing so by sharpening their awareness of what they collect, consume and use in daily habits.

"It was like we kind of empowered ourselves," Thacker said. "It was fun that we were able to take off. It was our own little group."

Such is the EcoTeam credo, which aims for a marriage of environmental activism and urban sensibilities at the most basic and personal level: in the home.

Part of worldwide network

The effort is coordinated by the Portland Sustainable Lifestyle Campaign as part of a worldwide network operated by Global Action Plan, a nonprofit environmental and community empowerment organization. Global Action started in 1989 and is based in Woodstock, N.Y. The campaign is a partnership between Portland and Global Action to promote EcoTeams throughout the city.

The program is gaining a strong foothold in Portland, where environmental matters sometimes seem of paramount importance. This can be seen in everything

LEAN AND GREEN

A program that promotes more efficient choices in daily living and practices in the home is gaining momentum in Portland, particularly in Southeast. **Who:** Portland Sustainable Lifestyle Campaign What it does: The campaign works in partnership with the city to create EcoTeams, which consist of five or six households working together to incorporate more Earth-friendly and less-excessive habits into daily living.

Where: Portland Sustainable office, 3534 S.E. Main St.

Why a team: The teams provide an active and tangible support network for people who want to pursue

from public and private tree preservation and planting programs, to pride in a city recycling program with one of the highest participation rates nationally, to embarrassment about possible designation of parts of the Willamette River as a highly polluted federal Superfund cleanup site.

The EcoTeam campaign taps into the city's environmental idealism by provid-

ing a formal process for Earth-friendly living approaches centered on community and consciousness through neighborhood support.

ways to consume less. The groups also build community by encouraging new or stronger relationships between neighbors. **How many:** Of the 96 teams formed in Portland, 46 are in Southeast. There have been 18 teams started in the Richmond neighborhood, the most in any neighborhood. Portland Sustainable hopes to create 60 more teams by August. Elsewhere in the Northwest, there are EcoTeams in Bend and Issaquah, Wash. Teams also have formed in Columbus, Ohio; Kansas City; Madison, Wis.; and Philadelphia **More information:** Call the EcoTeam office at 230-9474.

Teams consists of five or six neighborhood households that meet eight times in four months. Each household uses a step-by-step workbook and a trained volunteer coach to incorporate more practical, less exces-

sive approaches to daily living.

Llyn Peabody, the campaign's program manager, said the focus is on attention to consumption, or eco-wise shopping, energy use, garbage, transportation and water use. The households, through team meetings, work together for each to reach its goals.

Apartment dwellers participate

Peabody said the Mulberry Ladies are unique in that they are the first team of apartment dwellers of the 96 teams formed in the city since the campaign's inception in January 1997. The group's distinctive name has more to do with a sense of place than the mission at hand.

Munro-Reyes said "Mulberry" refers to a nearby street. "High Density Earth Dwellers" hints at the team members' residences in the same apartment building on the outer edge of Ladd's Addition.

"It took us how many meetings to come up with that name?" Munro-Reyes said amid laughter during a recent meeting at her apartment that was attended by Karen Wagner, the cam-

paign's assistant program manager.

Munro-Reyes said it took less time to prepare a mission statement, which reads: "Creating a sense of community with our neighbors, the environment and the Earth."

For Bewley, working to achieve that goal has been a learning and reaffirming experience. "I think one of the positive things is that I was able to recognize what I was already doing," she said.

Wagner praised the group's efforts but raised the bar, stressing the need for each member to push forward by encouraging formation of more EcoTeams.

"What we want to see is that it doesn't die," she said. "That each team gets at least one team going. We're really crossing our fingers now that you who are in this springtime season will really get out and inspire people. You can share compost and harvesting vegetable plots. You will spread the word through your action to whoever you meet or know."

You can reach Wade Nkrumah at 503-294-5947 or by e-mail at wadenkrumah@news.oregonian.com