



Natural

> CONVERGENCE <

Making a festival
from the glow of
our green islands

By ANDREA RABINOVITCH
Photos by Ken Sakamoto

People wearing clothes with unfamiliar fibres and the plastic banners hanging from vendors' booths were two clues that the Organic Islands Festival on July 7 and 8, 2007 wasn't just another medieval faire filtered through a 1960s sensibility. The marketing savvy of the 21st century was also a dead give-away.

Those needing to make the sale and those wanting to get the word out about what was possible if we're going to save the planet were hawking every manner of "green" product one could ever want or hope for.

Held at Victoria's Glendale Gardens and Woodland with winding paths, ponds and tagged plant life interspersed between the booths, the weekend offered guest speakers, musical performances, tastings, cooking and other demonstrations.

Conversations with vendors initiated my own thoughts, ranging from "Yeah, I can incorporate that into my lifestyle" to "You mean drinking that potion will increase my spiritual vibration and my sexual potency? Mm-hmm."





“I wanted to be more proactive. Is it possible? It’s certainly worth trying.”

DEB MORSE
Organic Islands
Festival co-founder

Festival director Deb Morse and her husband Stewart came up with the idea four years ago.

“It was a flash of inspiration that created it all,” Morse enthused. “I was a new mom and because of my child’s allergies, I wanted to connect with people, products and services that supported the lifestyle choices that I wanted to make.”

Clearly she was not alone. Last year, she and Stewart, two part-time staff and 70 volunteers created an event that attracted more than 100 exhibitors and 4,000 people. That’s not a whole lot of help for a festival of this size, but while chatting with Morse on the second day of the event, she remained chipper and articulate.

“Are we meeting our needs while supporting the next generation’s ability to meet their needs?” she asked rhetorically. “I wanted to be more proactive. Is it possible? It’s certainly worth trying.”

The festival’s Saturday started out overcast, but eventually the sun shone, heating up the gorgeous location. Strolling down a lane towards the front gate, I was ready to discover how I could venture into becoming more sustainable. Stories of families of four who produced

one tiny bag of garbage a year danced in my head.

Feeling rather overwhelmed by the array of booths, I gravitated to the Hippy Gourmet Bruce Brennan and his executive producer/director James Ehrlich from San Francisco, who were giving a cooking demonstration with their solar oven. While Brennan put an organic ratatouille together, Ehrlich kept up the patter that was to become a recurring theme throughout the day.

Praising all things organic, a simpler lifestyle (without turfing the comforts we’ve all come to enjoy), renewed health and vigour, and the righteous feeling of saving the planet, the front men/women selling their products were definitely “working the crowd.”

Remember the guy that used to sell knives at the exhibition? He’d set up his display and start chopping. A crowd would gather, the entertaining sales pitch would commence and, by the end of the demo, you’d want to buy the whole set.

Most of the booths had a similar vibe, but these products were organic, sustainable and doing good for your family and the planet.

Educational booths offered interesting information on all manner of subjects, healing practitioners provided short respites from the snacking and chatting, and a special kids section entertained and educated while parents beamed.

Mae Moore, Pender Island-based Canadian singer/songwriter, entertained while switching from her guitar to her Appalachian Mountain dulcimer, charmed with her between-song patter and was a beautiful poster woman for organic farming and the Canadian music industry.

Most of the businesses were from Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, though interior B.C., Winnipeg, Montreal, Ontario and Seattle were the home towns of others. Everything from non-profit organizations to personal care and food-producing businesses set up shop for the weekend with samples aplenty.

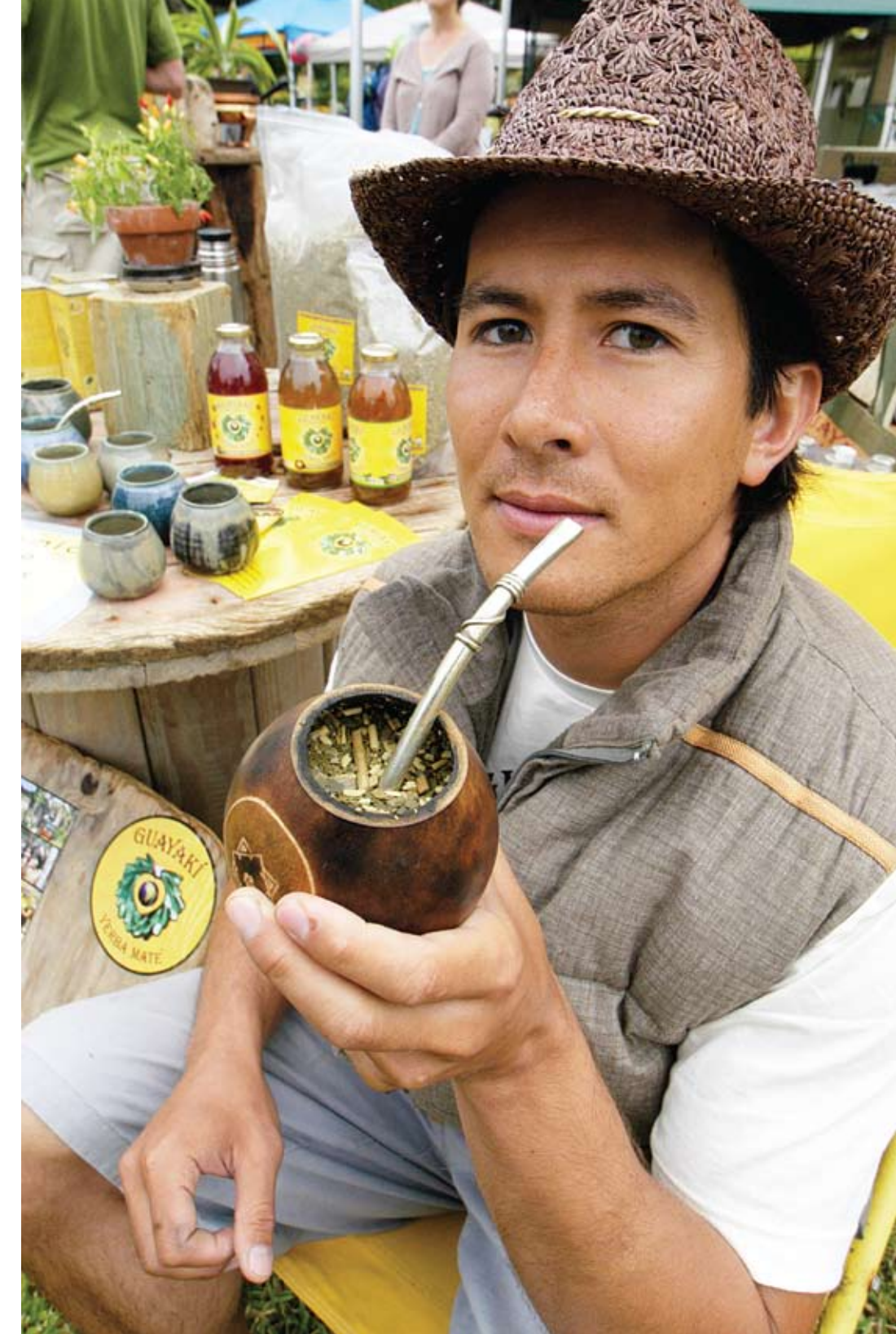
Gulf Islands businesses were well represented and, I like to think, just a little more laid back.

Marck Shipley from Salt Spring Gelato Delizioso Ltd. patiently explained the concept of “off-setting” and being “carbon neutral” while I sampled some of his organic vanilla gelato, making it a delicious and informative stop. Off-setting works when a person or business figures out their carbon footprint and then invests in companies or stock that receive renewable energy credits.

Salt Springer Gail Bryn-Jones’ Hotties Hot Dogs stand was one of the few places to get lunch, so the long line was worth the wait for her yummy organic chicken, all-natural beef, turkey and veggie wieners, home-made condiments, and buns from Salt Spring’s Embe Bakery. This year buy her Salt Spring Spice Hot Mustard, which features all natural ingredients made in small batches on the island.

For hot beverages, there was Salt Spring Coffee Company doing a brisk business sampling and selling their certified organic and fair trade coffee.

The Guayaki Yerba Mate folks, whose co-owner David Karr lives part-time on Salt Spring Island, had hired an engaging marketing firm of handsome young men, one of whom — Marc-Antoine Simard —



Above: Marc-Antoine Simard demonstrates the best way to drink Guayaki Yerba Mate — in a Juli Macdonnell pottery gourd.

Previous page: Sparkle-Lynn Jackson provides entertainment; Kenta Farms product sign.

Pages 14-15: Marck Shipley of Salt Spring Gelato Delizioso Ltd. offers a tempting treat; Helena Bryn-McLeod and Gail Bryn-Jones of Hotties Hot Dogs attempt to satisfy a long line of hungry festival patrons.

