

HEALTHWIRE

GOING NATURE'S WAY

PART II

By Candy Hamilton

Mariella Puerto, of the Environment Careers Organization (ECO) in Boston, M.A., sees the lack of diversity in the environmental professions as a personal challenge. Her academic degrees are in political science, but her heart was always in environmental work. She joined clubs and organizations to fight environmental problems like the hazards of lead poisoning for many Asian workers in the electronic field. Originally from Malaysia, she ended up at ECO because "I am passionate over racism and diversity in environmental work."

"Employers have to be flexible because a lot of minorities are not in standard science courses. I started with a non-profit as a support person, and two years later I was manager of the project," says Puerto.

Nancy Hwa, director of the National Wildlife Federation, had much the same experience, joining the Federation as an administrative assistant

with political science and journalism degrees. The federation has a particularly strong six-month internship program which pays \$270 a week with some benefits. The 13 interns get an introduction to federal environmental policy and do lobbying with Congress members.

"Tonantzin Land Institute's internship program in Albuquerque, N.M., sponsors a youth group with the express purpose of developing future organizers and leaders in environmental work. The institute's major focus is the preservation of Chicano and Indian land and water rights endangered by uranium, coal, and copper mining in the Four Corners Area (Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, and Arizona). Through it's intervention, the National Parks Service and the U.S. Forest Service have negotiated agreements protecting indigenous communities' rights.

Being culturally and environmentally aware can be of great help to communities combating environmental issues. An experience in Dilkon,

Arizona, a remote Dine (Navajo) community where most people speak only their Dine language, serves as an example. Because George Joe was both a University of Arizona biochemistry major and Dine speaker, his community stopped plans for a high level toxic waste incinerator and landfill in Dilkon. Waste Tech, Inc., representatives had described their \$35 million venture as a harmless project to burn trash, bury the ashes, and provide 175 jobs in a community with 75% unemployment. After Joe's presentation, however, the community elders ousted the politicians and Waste Tech and organized Dine CARE, which has sponsored two national environmental meetings.

Dilkon's experience has been repeated all across Indian land and the U.S. government and waste companies attempt to use economic blackmail on reservations with 70-90% unemployment and little or no economic base. Recently \$100,000 to \$3 million grants have been offered to reservation sites willing to store nuclear waste.

Native Americans are not alone, however, in their fight to protect their land. The landmark study Toxic Waste and Race (1987) documented incidences of environmental discrimination in communities of color all over the U.S. The United Church of Christ's study found that communities with two or more active hazardous waste plans or landfills had three times as many minorities as communities without such facilities.

Plenty of jobs at good salaries await students like George Joe, who complete math, computer, and science programs. Government, private corporations, non-profit advocacy groups, and others have grown up around this relatively new industry. Hydrologists' toxicologists, civil, chemical, and process engineers; chemists and chemical technicians; a variety of biologists, managers, and lawyers are among those who are needed to continue the work of protecting our environment.

Candy Hamilton is a freelance journalist living in Oglala, South Dakota.

AAMC CALLS FOR NATIONAL COMMISSION TO OVERSEE SUPPLY

WASHINGTON, D.C., — Congress should establish an independent commission to help ensure the nation has the right number and type of physicians and an "all-player" fund to support graduate medical education, according to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC). The National Physicians Resources Commission would determine the total supply of doctors needed; set goals for the total number of training positions (residencies) and their distribution among generalist (primary care) and other specialties; and identify incentives for meeting those goals.

Initially, the commission would set targets for generalists and other specialists. If, within reasonable amount of time, there were not enough medical school graduates entering generalist practice and if a national all-player fund was established, then the commission would be empowered to take a more regulatory approach.

"Some have argued that market forces may yet solve problem of specialty maldistribution, but thus far, market forces alone have failed to do so," said AAMC President Robert G. Petersdorf, M.D. "We believe this policy does give market forces a chance to work prior to advocating strong regulatory control."

The recommendations appear in a position paper on graduate medical education (GME), one of four such papers drafted by an AAMC advisory panel on health care reform.

The GME paper also proposes that all public and private

purchasers of health care services contribute to a national all-player fund — separate from payments for patient care services — to pay teaching hospitals and other physician training sites for faculty and resident salaries,

VOLUNTEER MOTHERS NEEDED IN WLVS

A group of concerned mothers of West Las Vegas have got together with Clark County Health District to form Baby Find Program.

The Baby Find Program is dedicated to supporting women during pregnancy and at the same time lower the Infant Mortality Rate (i.e. death before age one year) and improving the Low Birthweight Rate in the Afro-American community.

Baby Find operates by recruiting volunteer resource mothers or "big sisters", and pairing them with pregnant women - "little sisters". A big sister mentors her little sister throughout her pregnancy and for up to 1 year after delivery.

Big sisters do whatever they can to ensure their little sister has a safe, successful pregnancy, and then continues to

administrative costs and overhead associated with GME.

"Training doctors is a critical health care function from which everyone benefits, but it costs money — an estimated \$5 billion — (See AAMC, Page 21)

support her after her baby is born. Resource mothers receive training and support from the program

Coordinator who is a registered nurse. Little sisters are from all age groups, but many teenage moms are in need of this kind of help.

In the short time this program has been operating in West Las Vegas, all the mothers who have been helped by the Baby Find Program have said that the support they received during their pregnancy and afterwards really made a difference: some want to now become big sisters themselves. Many little sisters say "I didn't feel alone anymore, it felt good that somebody cared."

A recent example of Baby Find in action demonstrates how the program works - Sandra (not (See Volunteer, Page 21)

NLV PUBLIC HEALTH CENTER

Many residents in the North Las Vegas area are not aware of the services in their own backyard. Rather than coming to the main Health District site on Shadow Lane for many health and wellness services, North Las Vegas residents can save time by visiting their neighborhood Health Center on Civic Center Drive.

The North Las Vegas Public Health Center is part of the Clark County Health District. Services offered are free of charge or very low cost, ranging from Family Planning and pregnancy testing, immunizations and Seniors Health Care. The North Las Vegas Public Health Center is located at 3262 Civic Center Drive and is open from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM Monday through Friday. For more information, call 624-3525.

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