

Buying nothing but peace of mind

By Bob Morse Ashland Culture of Peace Commission

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“The Buy Nothing Project is a good fit with a culture of peace because we share the vision of building community and trusting one another,” says Paula Mixson of this neighborhood-based, goods-and-services exchange. Founded in 2014 on Bainbridge Island, Washington, Buy Nothing values people and enhances neighborliness through respect and kindness.

Another member of this project, Reverend Linda Reppond, creates community through her Launching Pad ministry. “Ashland’s coming together to grieve the recent stabbing death of one of its sons,” observed Reppond, “underscores how community bridges the chasm of separation.”

Reppond suggested that the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC) explore how the Buy Nothing movement supports the ACPC mission of transforming attitudes and behaviors into ones that foster harmonious relationships with each other and the natural world. Several Buy Nothing advocates joined Reppond and me in the ACPC office.

“A culture of peace starts with our (stewarding the) land,” says Jake Cox. “Buy Nothing thrives in Ashland because sustainability (and recycling) is part of Ashland.” Offering no-longer-needed items on the Facebook group Buy Nothing is “choosing respect for the land, which by extension, makes us more peaceful with our neighbors.”

The Buy Nothing website doesn’t discourage shopping in stores. It simply states, “Post anything you’d like to give away, lend, or share among neighbors. Ask for anything you’d like to receive for free or borrow. We also encourage our members to request gifts of self, talent and time.”

Victoria Sage reflected on historic roots of sharing customs. “In pre-colonial give-away ceremonies, (there was) faith in community that supported you. You cleared your energy off of (the give-away items). You were not attached to it.”

“It’s so empowering to give and receive free from expectation of how others will use what they receive,” adds Jace Green, an Ashland native, who became hooked on Buy Nothing upon witnessing the outpouring of gratitude expressed by recipients.

Cox described the importance of giving gifts directly to people. “It gives people a new platform for sharing. This new paradigm is a giving of ourselves.”

“It’s a deeper level of mindfulness to not be throwing things out,” Willow Murawski affirms. “It brings me a lot of joy to re-gift things and to create stories and community at the same time.”

To Murawski, “sharing stories creates the magic of Buy Nothing and helps givers select receivers,” which leads to neighbors getting to know one another.

Mixson explains, “Our ideal is to personalize your ask and personalize your offer with stories; Willow is the best at modeling that.”

Green notes, “Members lead by example.” Members reinforce there being no postings of advice, recommendations, or community announcements and emphasize such norms as transparency.

“Honesty is what we want,” states Mixson. “If you plan to re-sell what you receive, be open and honest about it.”

“The loop is broken if the person doesn’t show up to pick up; it’s part of the honesty,” says Murawski. To articulate the importance of accountability to the Buy Nothing Project, Green quoted a guiding principle of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission: “The ACPC establishes trust through holding all persons responsible for their actions.”

Conversely, Murawski continues, “We learn to communicate better by arranging the pick-up and deliveries.”

According to the Buy Nothing website, “Our groups are not just another recycling platform. A gift economy’s real wealth is the people involved and the web of connections that forms to support them.”

Gift giving and receiving was a theme that wended its way throughout this conversation. Gift examples were as small as a colander, as large as an automobile. Both Murawski and Green spoke of life-threatening health conditions as gifts that changed their lives. Sage noted, “Supposedly, one of the founders had asked the original Buy Nothing network if she could have (the gift of) a grandmother.”

Unexpectedly, the Buy Nothing magic of matching expressed needs and acknowledged abundance manifested within the ACPC office.

Murawski lamented. “I don’t have grandchildren. I’m considering getting involved with (a mentoring) program. But I just want to be in my garden.”

Then she realized that she could ask her Buy Nothing group for a grandchild. “I am an ornamental horticulturist. I want an apprentice.”

Without skipping a beat, Reppond replied. “My ministry is young adults and families. I know just the person to come learn from you.”

— Bob Morse is an ACPC Peace Ambassador. For more on the Buy Nothing Project, see <https://buynothingproject.org>. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter.



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