

Seeing Green

In the November print issue, we introduced you to Georgia's blossoming new crop of eco-preneurs - folks with a savvy business plan and a concern for the environment.

By Jerry Grillo

The Herb Whisperer

Patricia Kyritsi Howell is a clinical herbalist, master gardener and sought-after teacher. She's headquartered in Rabun County, the northeastern tip of Georgia. Her classroom is the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

On a warm Saturday three women from different parts of Georgia have gathered in a rustic meeting room on the Foxfire property near Mountain City to learn from Howell, whose BotanoLogos programs emphasize education in the use of wild, native medicinal herbs. She's taking the study of natural medicine and therapeutics out of the clinic and right to the source.

"If we lived in an older, traditional culture we'd learn these things first hand," says Howell, who grew up in northern Illinois, where she developed an interest in medicinal plants of the Midwest prairie. She moved to California, studied audio engineering, worked in, then dropped out of, the music business. 'It was fun, but grueling and not very healthy. I'd been interested in plants for years, and I wanted to go back and learn more, live as close to the Earth as possible."

Today Howell is acknowledged as one of the best at what she does - she is BotanoLogos, which means - someone who speaks for the plants - in ancient Greek. Howell teaches an intensive eight-month course (\$1,500 tuition), leads a series of one- to three-day courses throughout most of the year, and hosts weekly herb walks.

On a walk around the wooded Foxfire facility, it's difficult to take more than a few steps at a time, because Howell introduces almost every plant, and every plant has a use. Plant identification, as well as ethical harvesting and ensuring the sustainability of native plants are essential parts of the BotanoLogos teaching mission.

The women who have gathered are a diverse group. One is a registered nurse, another a licensed pharmacist. They have gladly paid \$175 each for the two-day "Healing with the Five Elements" course, the last BotanoLogos program in Northeast Georgia for the year. Then, it's off to Crete for Howell, a Greek-American who spends a few months each year in the land of her ancestors, teaching others who want to learn the universal language of healing plants.

Healing Heads

Lisa Saul was pregnant with her son 15 years ago when the rashes and sinus problems got really bad. A hairdresser since 1984, she was teaching a class in hair color at the time. "I wondered, if

this is what these chemicals are doing to my body, imagine what could happen to my unborn child," says Saul, an Augusta native who became committed to finding an alternative for chemically aware people.

She found a chemist in California who made natural hair products and opened her EcoColors salon in Atlanta in 1991. By 1993, when the Internet was in its infancy, she started selling EcoColors natural and permanent hair color on the Web. The Internet is her only marketing tool and today Saul sells her product all over the world. She has a distributor in Holland to serve an enthusiastic European market.

The small Atlanta salon where Saul spends most of her time playing with people's heads features, among other things, veggie hair coloring (henna, an all-natural temporary dye), aromatherapy relaxers, scalp massages and a garden for the occasional outdoors hair treatment.

Saul, who has a degree in medical technology from the Medical College of Georgia, stays active at the EcoColors lab in Tucker, improving the formula she purchased years ago. There are small traces of chemicals necessary to make a hair coloring permanent, but the main ingredients include lecithin, vitamins E and C, nettles, grapefruit seed extract, rosemary, flax oil, castor oil and flower essences. Saul's motto is: "Healing the planet, one head at a time." Bottom line, her rash cleared up long ago and hasn't returned.

Family Affair

When Atlanta dentist Peter Boulden decided to build his first practice from the ground up, he received words of advice and admonition from his big sister Jennifer. "She said I'd better do it the right way, the responsible way," Boulden says. "She made me more aware, made me realize that we have a short stay on Earth and we should try to leave a positive impact."

So when Boulden designed the Atlanta Dental Spa, he tried to do the right things. He went paperless: even the bathrooms have cloth towels. He went digital, "no photo chemicals getting sucked down the drain," he says. He put in bamboo floors (a non-wood alternative, because bamboo is actually a grass). He also enhanced the patient experience with ergonomic chairs, an Internet cafe, noise-canceling headphones (can't hear the drill, just sweet, sweet music), waterfalls, orchids, 27-inch satellite TV in the walls, in the ceilings.

It isn't dark green, it's light green, which is fine by big sister Jennifer, an Atlantantative who now lives in Montana and recently co-founded Ideal Bite, a Web venture that links green businesses and conscientious consumers. The goal, she says, is to lighten up the process - inject a little fun and chutzpa into the green movement, make environmental education entertaining as well as enlightening. Ultimately, she'd like to close the gap between good intentions and actual green living, with the understanding that most conscientious consumers don't want to be inconvenienced. Her brother, she says, was a willing participant.