

## 2009 DJC Newsmakers

What do Mayor Sam Adams, developer Art DeMuro and alternative energy entrepreneur Nancy Floyd have in common?

All three have made the grade as 2009 Newsmakers, as identified by the Daily Journal of Commerce.

The DJC created the Newsmakers event and publication as a way to identify the most interesting people who influence and impact the local built environment.

### **An inconvenient architect realizes his potential**

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**Tell the DJC readers about a defining moment or event in your life that shaped you and/or your career.**

In 2001-02, my wife and I both quit our successful jobs and took a one-year sabbatical bicycling throughout Asia. We got to live and work on a farm in Ladakh, the Indian Himalaya, where we learned what a fully sustainable culture with 8,000-square-foot homes can look like. We were 12 weeks into the trip in India when 9-11 happened and we found that country's outpouring of sorrow and compassion humbling and heartening. We were amazed at people's warmth and compassion throughout the trip, and returned feeling invigorated to seek employment where we could both make a living and work to make the world a better place – we both succeeded on both counts.



**Do you have a mentor or personal hero who played a role in helping you become the person and professional you are? Who was it and how did he/she impact your life?**

Even though I was raised in Boulder, Colo., and got a degree in Environmental Design there – all the while surrounded by various forms of social and environmental activism – I had never really realized my potential, and my obligation, in the world until I saw Al Gore make his Inconvenient Truth presentation in person at the Oregon Convention Center, nine months before the movie came out. It genuinely changed my life, and the movie with its subsequent shift in the global consciousness only magnified the effect greatly. From there, Ed Mazria's 2030 Challenge and Cascadia Region Green Building Council's Living Building Challenge authored by Jason McLennan defined why and how I should act as a design professional in the post 'Inconvenient Truth' world.

**What do you think is the biggest challenge facing Portland and/or Oregon with regard to its ability to remain a top player in the areas of sustainability, smart growth, urban planning and/or transportation?**

Short-sighted opposition to progressive and experimental policy and projects, and/or the lack of related political vision, will and leadership needed to enact the same. If we can rise above our sometimes limited views of ourselves, we could accomplish so much.

**With regard to your answer to the previous question, what role do you see yourself playing during the coming year with regard to helping Portland and/or Oregon meet that challenge?**

I will continue to advocate and push for the exciting and progressive policies which are before us right now: Gov Kulongoski's proposed climate change and energy policies are as progressive and forward thinking as any in the nation, and we have a legislature poised for success – it is important that we do not slide back to a belief that small, incremental change is acceptable in the face of this climate crisis. The city of Portland's High Performance Green Building Policy has the potential to transform how cities, even at their limited scale, influence state, regional and national policy.

I will also continue to pursue, study, research and speak about the 2030 Challenge and the Living Building Challenge, in that I see that these two ideas, in combination, have the ability to transform our industry. In fact, they already are.

**What do you think is the biggest challenge facing the building industry during the coming year, and how do you see yourself helping the industry overcome that hurdle?**

Holding onto all of the talent and embedded green knowledge that exists here in our region as we weather the economic storm and/or the inability to accept and rise up to the responsibility the design/construction industry has to mitigate climate change through dramatic increases in building efficiency.

**If it were solely up to you, what project or building would you most like to see happen in the region this year?**

The Sustainability Center of Excellence currently being solicited in a Portland Development Commission RFP. This one project has the potential to do more for the green building movement, and in cementing Portland's reputation as a national/international leader in green building expertise than any other building in the region under construction or consideration.

**What do you think is the biggest obstacle keeping Portland's built environment from moving forward (e.g. The economy, the city's building design-review process, etc.)?**

The economy is creating enormous drag on project development and investment, but it is still surprising how many projects are being pursued. Clearly, major increases in building projects will not occur until the investor market thaws considerably, but if existing building analysis and retrofits are added to the mix, I think the obstacles could be removed faster than many expect.

Given this, the real "biggest obstacle" could prove to be our lack of creativity in how to remake our professions and our industry in the face of a complete economic reset. As long as we blame the "economy," we will be waiting for it to "change" – that's what will keep us from moving forward. There is more good work to be done than ever before in human history, partly because we have been so indiscriminate with our work to date. Let us move beyond obstacles and get down to the work of remaking our existing buildings in an energy efficient way and making our new buildings as if they are our legacy, not just our next meal.

**Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years? In the next 10 years?**

Continuing to explore all of the inter-related systems which make up our modern world and the ways to connect, and cross-connect, those dots in ways that remove silos and expand society's view of what we can be, allowing us to be comfortable with being more than we are today.

I am also sure that I will have completed another bicycle sabbatical, thereby creating new amazement within me for the world and the paradox of humanity – both our short-sighted approach to "civilization" juxtaposed with our limitless capacity for good and compassion. We are one of nature's biggest and riskiest experiments, and I continue to believe that we will discover, en masse, that finishing the experiment as an integral part of the world is preferable to that of the only species to have designed our own demise.

**Please share a little known fact about yourself, something that people might be surprised to know.**

My wife and I downsized from a 2,500-square-foot, uninsulated house in Northeast Portland to an insulated 1,200-square-foot house still in the Northeast Portland and cut our energy usage by 66 percent with no change in lifestyle. We then replaced all of the energy systems in the house (heating and hot water) and added solar hot water and photovoltaics and further cut our usage to 77 percent less than the other house. This move turned our home finances upside down (in a good way), cutting our utility costs by three-quarters, our taxes in half and our mortgage by one-third, thus allowing us last year to pay our house off in three years – the timing couldn't have been better.