The Berkana Institute

From Hero to Host
A Story of Citizenship in Columbus, Ohio

Deborah Frieze and Margaret Wheatley

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Something extraordinary is happening in Columbus, Ohio.

Leaders in some of America's largest institutions—healthcare, academia, government—are giving up take-charge, heroic leadership, and choosing instead to engage members of their community. They're using their positional power and authority to act as "hosts," calling together people from all parts of the system to work together to solve seemingly intractable problems. In this mid-size, Middle America city—a mirror of the U.S.'s mix of race, income, immigrants, neighborhoods and problems—citizens are rethinking how to solve hunger long-term, how to deal with homelessness, how to transform healthcare from sickness to wellness, and much, much more. Here, in this absolutely ordinary city, citizens are discovering their capacity to engage together to create a healthier, more resilient community. This is a story of how small, local efforts move laterally through a network of relationships to emerge as large-scale change.

From Hero to Host

America loves a hero. So does the rest of the world. Perhaps it's our desire to be saved, to not have to do the hard work, to rely on someone else to figure things out. Constantly we are barraged by politicians presenting themselves as heroes, the ones who will fix everything and make our problems go away. It's a seductive image, an enticing

promise. And we keep believing it. Somewhere there's someone who will make it all better. Somewhere, there's someone who's visionary, inspiring, brilliant, and we'll all happily follow him or her. Somewhere . . .

Well, it is time for all the heroes to go home, as the poet William Stafford wrote. It is time for us to give up these hopes and expectations that only work to make people dependent and passive. It is time to stop waiting for someone to save us. It is time to face the truth of our situation—that we're all in this together, that we all have a voice—and figure out how to mobilize the hearts and minds of everyone in our communities.

Why do we continue to hope for heroes? It seems we assume certain things:

- Leaders have the answers. They know what to do.
- People do what they're told. They just have to be given good plans and instructions.
- High risk requires high control. As situations grow more complex and difficult, power needs to be moved to the top (with the leaders who know what to do.)

These beliefs give rise to models of command and control that are revered in organizations and governments worldwide. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy submit to the greater vision and expertise of those above. Leaders promise to get us out of this mess; we willingly surrender individual autonomy in exchange for security.

But the causes of today's problems are complex and interconnected. There are no simple answers, and no single individual can possibly know what to do. Not even the strongest of leaders can deliver on the promise of stability and security. But we seldom acknowledge these complex realities. Instead, when things go wrong, we fire the flawed leader and begin searching for the next (more perfect) one.

If we want to transform complex systems, we need to abandon our exclusive reliance on the leader-as-hero and invite in the leader-as-host. Can leaders be as welcoming, congenial and invitational to the

people who work with them as they'd be if they had invited them as guests to a party? Leaders who act as hosts rely on other people's creativity and commitment to get the work done. Leaders-as-hosts see potential and skills in people that
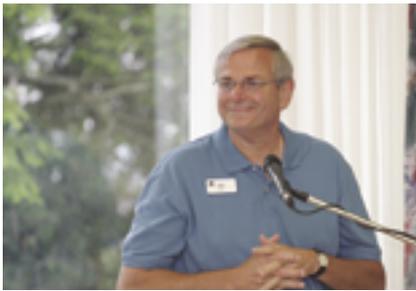
Phil Cass

people themselves may not see. And they know that people will only support those things they've played a part in creating—that you can't expect people to "buy in" to plans and projects developed elsewhere. Leaders-as-hosts invest in meaningful conversations among people from many parts of the system as the most productive way to engender new insights and possibilities for action. They trust that people are willing to contribute, and that most people yearn to find meaning and

possibility in their lives and work. And these leaders know that hosting others is the only way to get large-scale, intractable problems solved.

The story in Columbus began in 2002, when this new approach to leadership began to take root in Phil Cass, CEO of the Columbus Medical Association and Foundation. Phil attended The Shambhala Institute—Authentic Leadership in Action (ALIA), where he met skilled practitioners of circle and community building from around the world who profoundly changed his whole approach to leadership. They were practicing the *Art of Hosting*, conversational processes that resolve conflicts, develop strategy, analyze issues and develop action plans. But the Art of Hosting is more than a collection of problem-solving tools. In fact, it's easier to say what the Art of Hosting is *not*. It is neither a tool nor a methodology. It is not a strategy, although it serves well in strategic planning. It is not a leadership technique, although it calls upon leaders to fundamentally shift the way they contribute to their organizations and communities. It

is, says Tuesday Ryan-Hart, an Art of Hosting practitioner who works closely with Phil in Columbus, "a *practice*, like yoga or meditation. There are tools in it, for sure—social technologies like circle, Open Space and World Café that surface a group's collective intelligence through conversation. But there are deeper patterns present in the Art of Hosting that invite us to be authentic, to stay in inquiry, to build community."

This may sound a bit vague, but its very real outcomes and benefits are visible throughout Columbus and beyond, as people have come together to tackle issues of poverty, healthcare, homelessness, education, public safety and more.

From Finding Food to Ending Poverty

In October 2009, the Mid-Ohio Foodbank relocated to its new headquarters: a 204,763-square foot former mattress outlet that now has the capacity to move 33 million pounds of food per year onto the tables of Central Ohio's hungry citizens. The Foodbank's

president and CEO, Matt Habash, passionately shows off this new building: its LEED-gold status (the internationally recognized green-building certification system), the repurposed fixtures and recycled carpets, the cold storage layout that

Matt Habash

makes efficient use of cooler and freezer space, the organic recovery program that sorts leftover produce from grocery stores, the waterless urinals that save 40,000 gallons of water a year *each*. He points out the proposed site of community gardens and greenhouses on the 14.5-acre property, where starter plants will one day be distributed through food pantries so that people may have their own gardens.

But Matt's pride and joy is the Community Room, a high-ceilinged,

modular meeting space filled with round tables and brightly colored chairs that is perfectly suited, he says, to hosting World Cafés.

Matt was introduced to the World Café in March 2005, when his friend Phil Cass invited

Mid-Ohio Foodbank

him to attend an Art of Hosting training. Co-founded in 1995 by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs, the World Café is a conversational process that links and connects ideas to reveal the collective intelligence in the room. What got Matt's attention, he says, was the power of intentional conversation. "I spend so much of my time in conversations that do not matter," he explains. "I just didn't want to have another useless conversation."

So in the fall of 2005, he decided to take a leap. "The staff didn't know what I was doing," he recalls. "I ordered round tables, four chairs at every table, even checkerboard tablecloths. I put out an invitation to one hundred people; sixty showed up. And then I asked them a question: What does ending hunger mean to you?" Apparently, that was a radical question. "To some food bankers," Matt continues, "that might mean there's enough food that the food pantry doesn't run out. But that doesn't solve the problem. I wanted to move down the continuum from finding food to ending poverty."

That first Café spawned new questions that would transform the Mid-Ohio Food Bank's approach to its mission. They participated in a regional food movement across seven counties exploring how to shift the proportion of food produced locally from one to ten percent. They turned over the design of the on-site food pantry to its stakeholders—nutritionists and clients—who opted for a revolutionary grocery-store-like "Choice

Pantry" that gives power back to its clients. They developed new kinds of partnerships with local organizations that reconnect schoolchildren to local food and support urban agriculture and local farmers.

For Matt, these changes point to a profound shift in the Foodbank's purpose from handing out food to transforming the system that links food, hunger and poverty. To maintain that focus, he has integrated Art of Hosting practices throughout his organization—in fundraising campaigns, at senior staff meetings, with the board. "I don't hardly talk at board meetings anymore," he says. "I used to run them—you know, the world according to Matt. Instead, we move to a strategic level of conversation by using Café or sitting in circle." He points to three stones on his desk with words carved out: *Create. Imagine. Hope.* "I still struggle with how to introduce talking pieces [a tool that invites only the person holding the piece to speak]—that stuff can look hokey. But when people get engaged in the conversation, the process sells itself. It's easy to do. What I like about the talking piece is it slows the conversation down. You put the rules on the wall—speak with intention, listen with attention—it changes the dynamic. All of a sudden, you put the Blackberry down and pay attention. You don't talk over people. You learn to deeply respect other points of view."

The results, he says, are giving the Mid-Ohio Foodbank a leading role in the transformation of Central Ohio's food system. But what's most important to notice is that Matt is just one of many leaders throughout Columbus who are laying out checkered tablecloths and welcoming the whole community to create new solutions to their most intractable problems.

Stealth Hosting at Ohio State

More than 55,000 students spread across 1,762 acres. Twelve thousand courses offered in 457 buildings. Income of $4.45 billion. Ohio State is an empire of learning, the largest university in the country (until Fall 2009, when Arizona State scraped ahead by enrolling 38 more

students). It is a place where rankings matter: OSU boasts top 25 in *U.S. News & World Report's* 2010 ratings of the nation's best public universities; faculty are lauded for the number of Nobel Prizes, Guggenheims and Fulbrights they're awarded.

Here is academia in its fullest expression. On the one hand, revered as a source of ingenuity, critical thinking and the transmission of wisdom across the generations. On the other, criticized as the land of the lone wolf where collaboration can compromise your need for academic freedom, where there is a rigid hierarchy of presidents and provosts, deans and chairs, associate professors and assistants, those who have tenure and those who don't.

This is the world Tuesday Ryan-Hart walked into when she took a job in 2006 at the Women's Place, whose purpose is to make institutional change on campus for women faculty and staff. Her reaction was immediate distrust. "I knew it was absolutely not where I belonged from maybe the second or third day," she explains. "I'm all about leveling hierarchies, getting people to be together better. I've been a relatively successful person, so it's not like the hierarchy keeps me down—except where as a woman of color, I've experienced sexism and racism. But I inherently believe in equality and egalitarianism. Sometimes, preservation of hierarchy can be cloaked in talk of academic freedom. It works for those who have made it to the top of the hierarchy—they have a lot of investment in keeping the system going. But it doesn't work for those at the bottom."

She likely would not have stayed had it not been for her boss, Deb Ballam, a self-proclaimed rabble-rouser who was up for the task of disrupting the status quo. When Phil Cass invited Deb to attend an Art of Hosting training in November 2006, she sent Tuesday in her place. Neither woman was remotely aware of what this one act of saying yes would unleash on campus.

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Just northeast of the football stadium, The Knowlton School of

Architecture is a straight-backed, sharp-shouldered sentinel of concrete, marble and stone. The 165,000-square-foot facility is a paean to planning, a place where students study precision and technology, a structure that breathes order and discipline.

Which is why it might be a little disconcerting to stumble across 26 folks sitting in a circle of chairs around a centerpiece made of a green cloth, a black stone, tingshas (Tibetan cymbals) and a toy walking man made out of green foam. Taped to the walls are simple drawings on flip chart paper of a butterfly and a bumblebee, a page that reads "Law of Two Feet" and another with a yin-yang drawing labeled "Passion/Responsibility." Another page explains the principles of Open Space Technology, a process that invites participants to self-organize to create their own agenda rather than follow the facilitator's design.[1] So much for planning.

The chime of the tingshas reverberates through the room. A tall, silver-haired woman in a white turtleneck sweater introduces herself. "Good morning and welcome," she says. "I'm Hazel Morrow-Jones, a Professor and Associate Dean in City and Regional Planning. Our

Tuesday Ryan-Hart

purpose for today is to connect people's practice experiences, to connect with mates [a code word in the Art of Hosting community for fellowship] and share our learnings, and to strengthen our understanding of the deeper patterns of the Art of Hosting." She points to another flip chart page that outlines the flow of the day and then reminds people of some of their shared values and beliefs: "Listen with attention, speak with intention and take

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[1] www.openspaceworld.org

care of the well being of the group," she says. "Offer what you can; ask for what you need. Listen for what's happening in the middle that nobody brought into the room, but maybe we can all take out."[2]

These 26 people are members of the Art of Hosting Community

Knowlton School of Architecture

of Practice, a group of practitioners from all over Franklin County who spend half a day together every quarter to strengthen their clarity, courage and commitment as hosts. There are people here from healthcare and food systems, from municipal government and the Board of Regents, from youth work

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[2] These are the practices of circle, made explicit through the work of Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea of PeerSpirit: www.peerspirit.com

and homeless shelters. But mostly, there are people here from OSU.

Tuesday and Deb Ballam called the first Art of Hosting training at OSU in April 2007. Since then, the Art of Hosting has coursed through Arts and Sciences, Comparative Studies, Political Science, City and Regional Planning, Veterinary Medicine, Dentistry and Social Work; through the University's Human Resources department, through Service Learning and Student Life, through the President's Council on Women and the Institute on Women, Gender and Public Policy. And those are just the places Tuesday and Deb *know* about. They have initiated more than 150 people into the practice, people who then spread it through their own departments and beyond. In fact, Oregon State, Indiana State Bloomington and Iowa State have all visited OSU to check out what's happening.

This is the third visit to the community of practice for Tom Gregoire, the Dean at the College of Social Work. He attends the community of practice meetings because it gives him an opportunity

to exchange stories, share successes and tackle tough questions with fellow hosts. His story is about using his hosting skills to transform the Social Work department's curriculum, a notoriously combative process. "We did not have much of a history of successful conversations about curriculum—or anything else," he explains. "I sought a process that could help us think very creatively and collaboratively about curriculum. I also desired greater collegiality within our faculty and between our faculty and the community." This time around, Tom wanted to engage all stakeholders in the process: faculty, staff, students and local social workers. But he feared that might trigger some egos. "There was a tradition in our faculty, with just a few exceptions, of being relatively isolated from the practice community," Tom adds. "Generally, our faculty saw the community as out of step with best practice; the community thought our faculty relatively clueless when it came to practice in 'the real world'; and nobody in particular valued the student's voice."

Tom invited Hazel Morrow-Jones and Phil Cass to help him design and host a Curriculum Café for 92 participants to co-create principles for the College of Social Work's curriculum development. Following the Café, a group of 18 volunteers—comprised of students, staff, practitioners and faculty—distilled the agreements into ten principles that shape every curriculum conversation. "Those principles are beginning to pervade our faculty as a number of us try now to host rather than facilitate our meetings," Tom says. Today, that Café is fondly recalled as a turning point that's led to greater community involvement and goodwill throughout the College of Social Work.

Similar stories surface from others at OSU, although outside the community of practice, they're often talked about in whispers. "We call it stealth hosting," Deb explains. "The department chairs want to bring it in, but they know they can't call it 'World Café' with their faculty. Faculty can be pretty mean to each other. And they don't want to be laughed at. You put your reputation

on the line when you try something new." So Tuesday and Deb find other ways of bringing it in, and then trust what emerges. "Particularly in faculty culture, people are desperate for connection," Deb adds. "At the end of a program, people will come up to us and say, 'This is the first time I've felt part of something—part of human connection and part of community.' That is what we're all thirsty for."

Art of Hosting as an Operating System

The Art of Hosting might best be described as an operating system, like Windows, Mac OS or Linux. An operating system acts as a host for a variety of computing applications. It enables the computer hardware to communicate and operate with the computer software. It is a way of creating order so that the ever-growing and changing application options can continue to interact and communicate—ideally, without crashing.

In the predominant leadership operating system of command and control, order is created through hierarchy, strong boundaries, centralized resource management and decision-making that rests in the hands of the few. This is Microsoft's approach to its operating system for Windows. The source code (instructions written in a programming language) is proprietary, visible only to those who have a formal agreement with Microsoft; this allows the corporation to charge expensive licensing fees and maintain control over the system's boundaries, expressions and uses. By contrast, the Linux operating system is free and open source; its source code can be used, modified and redistributed among a limitless community of software developers who also agree to freely share their work. An open-source operating system is an excellent example of self-organization, in which a worldwide community of developers continuously create new and different applications by working with the same source code.

Like Linux, the Art of Hosting is order without control. Its "source code" is a set of core principles and practices for how to host

conversations that matter: setting intention, creating hospitable space, asking powerful questions, surfacing collective intelligence, trusting emergence, finding mates, harvesting learning and moving into wise action. The Art of Hosting invites us to use the same process in different settings—like the Foodbank or OSU—to create different outcomes. This operating system can be used by any group of people who want to discover the wisdom that exists not in any one of us, but in all of us.

The people of Columbus are using this operating system to take on one of the United States' most intractable and complex problems: healthcare.

Affordable, Sustainable Healthcare For All

The first Columbus Art of Hosting training took place in March 2005. It was by invitation only, a hand-picked group of thirty-six leaders throughout Columbus. Dr. Marc Parnes, an OB-GYN physician who was also President Elect of the Columbus Medical Association at the time, hosted a conversation about the role of community in changing the healthcare system. Together, Phil, Marc and a few other community leaders dreamed up a plan to launch an exploration into affordable and sustainable healthcare. They experimented

Art of Hosting, Columbus

with a number of processes for engaging the community—physicians, hospital administrators, insurance company CEOs, community organizers, politicians and patients—ultimately creating a series of assemblies where more than one hundred participants showed up each time to identify strategies for advancing healthcare.

And then they discovered they'd been asking the wrong question.

It was at the third assembly when Toke Møller, an Art of Hosting practitioner who was invited to host the gatherings, asked Phil if he had ever been involved in a conversation about the purpose of the healthcare system. Phil's response, as Toke recalls, was a great surprise:

Dr. Marc Parnes (in scrubs)

Phil said, "In all the forty years I've worked within the healthcare system, I've never been in that question, and I've never heard anyone ask that question." I said, "Are you telling me that you're spending $7 billion a year in healthcare—if you count all the activities—and you guys have never talked about the purpose of what you're doing?" And he said, "I'm ashamed to realize that

we've never talked about it. It's about time."

This was one of the most profound large-scale assemblies I have ever been part of. We had a four-hour World Café around the question, "What should be the purpose of the healthcare system you want and need for this city and its future?" We had 120 people rotating through 25 tables. At the end of the Café, we put a microphone into the center and invited people to share one sentence about what the healthcare system should be. I thought five to seven of them would speak. But one after another, they came to the microphone—we couldn't stop them! They were all saying the same thing: We want optimal health.

Optimal health, as this group defined it, is about being as healthy as you can be, given what you've got—your individual physical, emotional and mental abilities. That means that optimal health is different for everyone—and

utterly attainable for all. But optimal health is not the purpose of our current healthcare system. "The system that we've known has been built on the wrong platform," Phil explains. "It's been built on a sick platform. As long as it operates on a sick platform, it will be unsustainable. When it's built on a sick platform, you're engaged in a zero-sum game: a fixed amount of resources are divided across sickness."[3] In Franklin County, that zero-sum game is abandoning 12.3 percent of the population, more than 134,000 people who are without healthcare—despite spending more than $6.4 billion annually on healthcare services.[4] In Columbus, community members have agreed that the platform needs to shift from being built on sickness to being built on optimal health. "Like life," says Phil, "there is no zero-sumness to health. There are millions of ways—infi-

nite possibilities for how we can support each other's health."

Marc, the physician, explains, "We'd been looking at how to change the sick system and not at how we promote wellness within our community so that the rescue system doesn't have to be as huge."

World Café on Optimal Health

Everybody is talking wellness. It's sort of one of those *duh!* type of things. But this time, the whole community came to it together. Producing wellness becomes a personal responsibility. It's not how am *I* going to make you well. It's how are *you* going to make you well."

Our Optimal Health is inviting citizens to explore ideas around a new and different system of healthcare in Franklin County. Here's just one example: In Clintonville, a neighborhood of Columbus,

[3] Phil and Toke explain this in a workshop in Nova Scotia, available on YouTube at www.youtube.com/watch?v=AxK51N_IwlY&NR=1
[4] Statistics from Our Optimal Health documents and based on 2004 figures.

residents are seeking to organize their own parallel healthcare system. "They're saying, 'To hell with the healthcare system!'" Phil says. "'If we can attract five family practice physicians and five nurse practitioners, we'll build our own primary care system and make it available to everyone in our geographic community.' They're not there yet, but I think that's where they're going to end up." The Clintonville Neighborhood Initiative is experimenting with Health Block Watches, a riff off Crime Block Watch, so that neighbors pay attention to one another's well-being, inviting each other into local walking clubs, spreading the word about yoga classes and nutrition events, and checking in on seniors and homebound residents. They are recruiting local dentists to provide free care to neighbors who can't afford it. And they are enrolling volunteers in transporting people in need to medical appointments.

For Dr. Marc Parnes, "Clintonville is a microcosm showing what's possible," he says. "A group of people are saying, 'We can do this. We

don't have to wait for it to trickle down.' I am so frustrated with our government and all the talk and effort being made to reform healthcare. In this short period of time, we've done much more exploring than I know them to have done. The only way I know to change the national conversation is to experiment with it locally and invite others into the conversation."

Which is exactly what happened to the conversation around homelessness.

A National Conversation on Homelessness

It was the summer of 2009 when Barbara Poppe got a call from the Obama administration. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan needed to present a new national plan to end homelessness to Congress by May 20, 2010, and was tapping her to head up the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. By the time she was hired, Barb had a month left to tie up loose ends at the Community Shelter Board in Columbus before reporting for duty in Washington, DC, on November

16. Her mandate is to get federal, state, local and private agencies working well together and innovating strategies that finally will bring homelessness to an end. Once in office, she had ten days to come up with a framework for Secretary Donovan and the White House. With that kind of time pressure, she turned to what she already knew: the Art of Hosting.

Phil Cass invited Barb to attend an Art of Hosting training in 2005, and it was love at first sight. "When I went to the Art of Hosting, it was deeply familiar," Barb says. "Folks sitting in circle, everyone having a voice, processes that engaged community. It aligned so closely with my life values. I was struck— oh my gosh, I am returning to something I know!" She was two meetings into Rebuilding Lives, a community-based strategic planning process on homelessness convened by the Community Shelter Board, when she tossed out their conventional approach to facilitation to, as she says, "go whole hog with Art of Hosting." The community meetings became entirely open processes attended by shelter service providers and funders, by advocacy groups and businesses, by former and current homeless citizens. Participants developed 96 strategies, which they collectively winnowed down to 11 priorities focused on pressing issues like how to coordinate emergency assistance, accelerate re-housing and connect to employment opportunities for Franklin County's more than 8,000 homeless people. Throughout the process, Barb herself had no vote. This was the community's plan. They voted on it, they stood behind it, they owned it. And even after she left for DC, they continued moving ahead, unperturbed by the loss of their leader. For as charismatic as Barb may be, she was not the hero of this system working to fight homelessness in Franklin County; she had been its host, and it no longer depended on her for its stability—it had become resilient.

Barb couldn't have known at the time that this was her trial run for a process she'd repeat at the national level. But hosting in the hospitable environment of Columbus is one thing; running it through government bureaucracy is entirely

another. Would this process—at times called "hokey" and "stealth" by its own practitioners—work among federal employees? "The current methods of collaboration weren't working," Barb reflects. "If it's broken, what do you have to lose in trying something new? I had learned to trust the process. Government is made up of people, and if we can tap the passion of people, we can do this."

Less than two months after she moved to DC, Barb was ready to take World Cafés national. Over a four-week period, more than 750 people in six cities gathered in World Cafés to inform the national strategic plan on homelessness. As in Columbus, they represented the full range of stakeholders, including the homeless themselves, who seldom if ever are included in the conversation about their future. The output of the Cafés was sent to a 60-person decision council that Barb assembled from the 19 federal agencies that needed to approve the plan. She laughs as she describes the reaction to her process by a jaded advocacy worker, who exclaimed, "What do you mean every person had a vote? There was democracy in the federal government?!? Has that ever happened before?"

Barb has bigger plans yet ahead. In June 2010, Tuesday and Phil offered an Art of Hosting training to Barb's staff to strengthen the hosting skills they'd need to implement the federal strategic plan in communities throughout the United States. "Under the Obama administration, we're supposed to be breaking down silos, creating open government initiatives," Barb says. "Our old practices don't work for that. I'm fascinated to see how the Art of Hosting fits. I've been wondering whether we should tell people what we're doing or just be stealth—*this is just how we do things.* We'll see whether it becomes viral, whether people start using it simply because it works. For now, what I know is people tell me they've gone to other interagency meetings, and they like ours better."

As for Columbus, the Art of Hosting has unequivocally gone viral, and become an important influence in how people choose to do their work. Phil and

Tuesday constantly stumble across *yet another* place that is practicing hosting. It's worked its way into the Chamber of Commerce, into government-convened task forces, into the city of Upper Arlington—where America's archetypal heroes, the police force and fire department, are experimenting with hosting as a leadership practice.

Columbus, Ohio: Leaders as Hosts, Citizens as Heroes

The citizens of Columbus Ohio are slowly but steadily walking out of a model of heroic leadership that most Americans assume is the only way to lead. "This country's culture, its basis for understanding itself, is based on rugged individualism," Phil says. "It's been what we've been proud of, counted on and pointed to as our success over the years. And it's fundamentally not working anymore. It's a huge counter-cultural act to do something as simple as dropping a talking piece into the conversation. People *like* the solutions that come out of a more collective way of operating. I believe hosting taps into a basic human need to be connected,

and to be connected in as unconditional a way as possible."

Leaders who journey from hero to host have looked beyond the negative dynamics of politics and opposition that hierarchy breeds, they've ignored the organizational charts and role descriptions that confine people's potential. Instead, they've become curious. Who's in this organization or community? What do people care about? What skills and capacities might they offer if they were invited into the work as full contributors?

Columbus, like any major city, is a collection of institutions locked in hierarchy and politics trying to do useful work. Yet leaders here didn't begin by trying to dismantle hierarchy. They chose a simpler way based on their belief in people. They invited people to come together to explore a good question: What does ending hunger mean to you? What is the purpose of the healthcare system? How can we create the community people are longing for?

They used their positional power to convene people, not to tell them

The World Café is a conversational process that links and connects ideas to reveal the collective intelligence in the room.

what to do. They learned that their city—any city—is rich in resources, and that the easiest way to discover these is to bring diverse people together in good conversations. People who didn't like each other, people who discounted and ignored each other, people who felt invisible, neglected, left out—these are the folks who emerged from their boxes and labels to become interested, engaged colleagues and citizens.

Hosting meaningful conversations isn't about getting people to like each other or feel good. It's about creating the means for problems to get solved, for teams to function well, for people to become energetic activists. The leaders of Columbus have created substantive change by relying on everyone's creativity, commitment, generosity. They've learned that these qualities are present in everyone and in every organization. They've extended sincere invitations, asked good questions, used a robust operating system and had the courage to experiment.

Their courageous efforts moved laterally across the city, state and nation, gaining ground where heroes had once prevailed. And now, people are discovering what's been there all along—fully human beings wanting to make a difference for themselves, their city, their children, the future.

ART OF HOSTING GOES GLOBAL

Just like an open-source operating system, the Art of Hosting has emerged through networks of relationships—and is spreading like freeware through organizations and communities around the world. It's been a multi-cultural, multi-generational, self-organized voyage of discovery, fueled by people's inventiveness, curiosity and generosity. Art of Hostings get held wherever people decide to call them, whenever people are willing to do the work of inviting a group together to have conversations that make a difference.

The result today is a vibrant global community whose breadth and impact is impossible to measure. In 2010 alone, Art of Hosting trainings have been held in the U.S., Canada and Mexico; in Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, France, The Netherlands, Sweden and the UK; in Australia, New Zealand and Japan. The movement also has spread to Brazil, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Israel, Greece, Slovenia and Greenland. It is serving as the operating system for children and family service advocates, financial planners, public educators and health service workers; for indigenous communities, rural villagers, union activists and faith-based groups.

No one knows exactly how many people have experienced the Art of Hosting, nor how many people are skilled to train others in the practice. That's because no one owns, runs or measures this movement. Despite the increasing demand for their hosting skills, the Art of Hosting community has remained self-organizing and passionate. They function as a community of practitioners who maintain their identity and coherence through clear values, a shared worldview, agreed-upon practices and a commitment to supporting one another. That integrity and commitment magnetizes people to them, resulting in rapid growth—without a single moment wasted devising a growth strategy. People practice the Art of Hosting because it works, and they love doing it. They practice the Art of Hosting because it invites us to do what humans do best: connect and create together. **www.artofhosting.org**

Margaret J. Wheatley is President Emerita and founder of The Berkana Institute. She has been working with people for many years to develop new practices and ideas for organizing people and communities. Meg is an internationally acclaimed speaker and author of *Leadership and the New Science*, *A Simpler Way*, *Turning to One Another*, *Finding Our Way*, and *Perseverance*.

Deborah Frieze is an author, entrepreneur and social activist. As former co-president of The Berkana Institute and co-founder of the Berkana Exchange, Deborah joined Berkana in 2002 to help bring its vision into the world and grow the Institute. She serves as a board member and is leading several initiatives that serve to create healthy and resilient communities. Deborah has an MBA from the Harvard Business School.

Meg and Deborah are co-authors of *Walk Out Walk On: A Learning Journey into Communities Daring to Live the Future Now* (2011).