

**SUZANNE SPROUL**

# Whole Earth Building set to open April 20

Uncommon Good primarily is a human services organization but one that realizes that helping the poor and saving the planet go hand-in-hand.

Executive director Nancy Mintie created the Claremont-based nonprofit in 2000. The group is an extension of previous work the attorney did in creating a legal and social services center for homeless people in Los Angeles.

That work now continues in the Inland Valley through Connecting to College mentoring; jobs programs; the promotion of urban agriculture; and the mentoring of Teen Green, a group of local high school students interested in the environment.

Uncommon Good has stepped up, too, to do its part in reducing its carbon footprint.

In fact, the nonprofit is set to open its new Whole Earth Building (WEB for short, to go along with its impact on the ecosystem or "web of life") just in time for Earth Day.



**Suzanne Sproul**  
Columnist

The building is on property owned by Claremont United Methodist Church and Claremont School of Theology. It is a shining example of construction done in an affordable, sustainable and functional way.

The Whole Earth Building is made possible in large part by a grant from the Reformulated Gasoline Settlement antitrust class-action suit. Others sharing the vision of sustainable housing joined in, including Ralph and Shirley Shapiro; the California Community Foundation; members of the Gabrielino-Tongva Band of Mission Indians; artist Sheila Pinkel; students and professors from Harvey Mudd and Pomona colleges; and Claremont Environmental Design Group.

After two years of planning and work, it's time to open the doors to the community. It is designed to be an educational and environmental community center. It also will become the new home of Uncommon Good, which has been housed in

space provided by Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church for 12 years.

A grand opening is set for April 20 at 10 a.m. The facility, which resembles a series of huts, is at 211 Foothill Blvd., Claremont.

Scheduled speakers include Dolores Huerta, who along with Cesar Chavez founded what would become the United Farm Workers. There will be musical entertainment, refreshments from Walter's restaurant, and building tours.

The building combines a generous helping of both old and new concepts — it was built by hand by hundreds of volunteers using 85 percent of on-site earth and photovoltaic energy. It is a prototype of what can be accomplished.

According to promotional literature, the WEB shows how people anywhere in the world can build comfortable and energy-efficient structures with little more than earth, sandbags and barbed wire.

And that's exactly the point, Mintie said. The building wasn't constructed to simply stand as a monu-

ment to how people can live and work in harmony with nature. It was built to show that on a daily basis.

The WEB will be available for meeting and educational purposes. Uncommon Good has had inquiries about the building from throughout the world most recently from Haiti, Niger and South America.

"This is the first of its kind of building in the world and we are excited that people are excited about it. This is a green building built by the community. We had children as young as 6 years old help out as well as people in their 80s, and everyone in between.

"This also is significant because the building is located on a site where the Tongva and people settled.

We want to model a way of showing how people, such as the Tongva did, can live in harmony with nature," Mintie said.

When building plans were being made, supporters took every detail into consideration, including the local ecosystem, the use of clean energy, protecting air quality and even replacing displaced habitats, which now have been planted on top of the building.

"This building doesn't need sprinklers because it won't burn. It's not going to be washed away by mudslides or floods. And it is built to withstand an 8.1 earthquake. This building proves that if you can build this type of building in Los Angeles County, you can build it anywhere because

Los Angeles County has the strictest building regulations in the world," she said.

The WEB shows, Mintie said, that doing the right thing for people and the environment is possible and that you don't have to suffer to choose a green lifestyle.

"The building has so many interesting features to it, but one I find fascinating is the solstice/equinox markers. They will show the cycles of nature. When I've pointed that out to children visiting here, they get so excited," Mintie said.

"This building comes alive and breathes with the seasons, allowing us to work with the climate in an artistic way."

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