

"Pay more attention to how corporations affect our culture and politics."

AN ACTIVIST IN HIS OWN BACKYARD

W. David Kubiak works to draw attention to injustice, influence

By TAMMY WELLS
Journal Tribune Staff Writer.
November 15, 2001

Listen to W. David Kubiak talk for a while and you learn two things: He's a smart guy and he seems to truly care about democracy and putting power in the hands of the people. There is passion for politics and social issues and it appears all-consuming: As others may find themselves passionate about tennis or murder mysteries or motorcycles, Kubiak immerses himself in social policy.

With a graying beard and hair flowing down his back, Kubiak, who moved back to Kennebunkport after spending two decades in Japan, looks like he belongs in 1967 — and some would probably suggest he should have stayed in that decade. That's the year the Kennebunk High School graduate finished studying at Bowdoin College, joined the Peace Corps and headed for Korea to work in public health.

"I discovered they didn't need white-boy medicine," he said, and moved on to Japan where, except for a stint back in the States in the mid-'80s, he lived until his return just over a year ago. Kubiak, 56, who ran for "virtual mayor" of Kyoto in the late 1990s, counts himself among the Mainers who are looking for change — changes in the way, for example, large corporations in his view influence the outcome of elections by the sheer amount of money invested in campaigns.

That's why he approves of Maine's Clean Elections campaign law.

"It's the first time in American history there's a level playing field," he said from a rocking chair in his Kennebunkport apartment. "It's a great law."

He also lauds the passage of Portland's non-binding universal health care referendum, despite the money bled into the campaign by health insurance companies seeking to defeat the measure.

A year ago Kubiak ran a campaign for the "New Hampshire democratic Vice Presidential Primary" under the banner of Big Medicine, a Maine-based non-profit research and education institute of which he is director, and announced his victory on the www.nancho.net web site.

Fittingly perhaps, he lives across the street from the local seat of democracy, the Kennebunkport Town Hall, and adjacent to a symbol of the corporate interest, a bank.

On Saturday, Kubiak will be joining others for a "solidarity" march and series of teach-ins examining such subjects as patriotism, bioweapons and security and globalization and U.S. foreign policy. The seminars will be preceded by a march to Walkers Point, leaving from St. Anne's Church at 11 a.m. followed by a public speakout at 11:30 a.m. The seminars begin at 2 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Kennebunk. among the speakers will be Maine author Carolyn Chute.

It's partly a war protest, Kubiak acknowledges, but the event is more than that in his view.

"It's a coming together of people concerned about peace and justice issues, racism and the corporate coup d'etat ... to begin a conversation about where this war is coming from and where it is likely to go," he said.

Corporate power is a recurring theme in Kubiak's conversation. Democracy coming from the people is another and that was one of the reasons he waged a campaign for mayor in Kyoto.

"It was a big publicity stunt," he said. There was a reason for that —again, to get people to think and talk about democracy and to introduce the concept of law-making coming from the populace similar to the referendum process in the United States.

The campaign resulted in a coalition of 27 towns and cities forming groups that put together a draft for a law in the Japanese parliament in 1999, he said. For Kubiak, it was as far as a foreigner could go.

He didn't win the mayoral race but earned 4,000 votes and essentially what he was shooting for, starting a conversation.

Here at home, he has concerns about what is now called homeland security and the possible seizure of liberties we now take for granted, because homeland security powers have not been spelled out.

Saturday's event is the second gathering of its kind; the first was held in Unity in conjunction with the Common Ground Country Fair in mid-September — one week after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington.

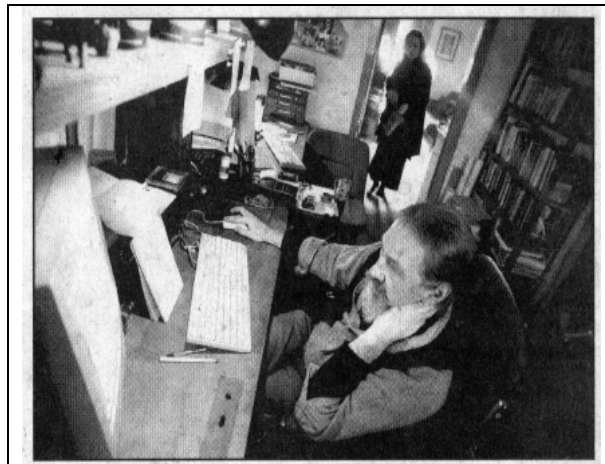
The event was a coming together of what Kubiak described as grassroots groups working for social change. That was followed by Labor Solidarity Day in Lewiston at the end of October that brought Maine's labor movement into the conversation.

Those represented are a broad spectrum of Maine's population, Kubiak said, not only the "lefties" but "old timers" who believe in the rights of home-as-castle. The movement, he said, is mostly concentrated in mid-coast and western Maine. He likens it to the chautauqua programs begun in the last quarter of the 19th century, where the thinkers of the day came together to discuss social issues.

Kubiak, who wrote for the Kyoto Journal, is now looking for an academic or editorial post. And hopes to make a movie this coming year - about a gubernatorial election — as a vehicle to talk about issues.

He says he wasn't what you would have called an activist during the '60s. But his first contact with politics was when the founder of the Green Party held a teach-in about Vietnam at Bowdoin. He's encouraged that young people appear to be interested in what he and others are saying.

Statistics, Kubiak said, show only about 10 percent of the population is attuned to what is going on in society and feel they have to do something, even if it's symbolic. Kubiak, it seems, is among them.



Kubiak works at his computer. His partner, Kathy Sokol-Kubiak, is in the background.