

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2006  
USA 26 November to 6 December



University of Toledo. Photo courtesy Timothy Ault, Dept. of Geography and Planning

SUNDAY 26th November: Arrived Toledo, Ohio, USA

MONDAY 27th - TUESDAY 28th NOVEMBER: For these two days I was the guest of the Urban Affairs Centre (UAC) of the University of Toledo. The people I was directly involved with from UAC for all of the time were Professor Neil Reid, Director; Mr Joe Perlaky, Project Manager; and Ms Paula Ross, Research Associate.

The University of Toledo has 17,000 students. Its layout and architecture is stunning. Toledo itself is a great city of 300,000 people with a very interesting industrial history. Its history is associated with the automobile and glass industry and its architecture and infrastructure reflects the prosperity that those industries brought.

When preparing for my study tour I had identified a number of factors/concepts etc that I believed were very important to the sustainability of agriculture in the urban and urbanizing situation. Cluster production and marketing was one of them. When I Googled those words, the UAC at Toledo University kept coming up. I related to what I read and contacted Neil Reid.

The UAC is working with a group of flower growers called the Maumee Valley Growers Association - <http://www.maumeevalleygrowers.com> - hit 'About MVG'.

What I found extremely valuable and interesting was the role the UAC was playing in the development of the Maumee Valley Growers Association and how they were playing that role.

Essentially UAC has established a systemic process by which it has engaged with at least 33 individual and very independent growers who saw absolutely no reason to come together to form any type of group. An example of one of the benefits that the group has achieved is that they can now purchase their energy needs at a significantly discounted rate compared to what they could buy it for as individuals. There are other benefits as well but I will draw all that out in my report. I will examine the process in the report as well.

I met with one of the growers, Richard Bostdorff and his family. The name of their family business is Greenhouse Acres Ltd. One of their enterprises is growing out and direct marketing poinsettias. The poinsettias are a favorite plant at Christmas time. When I suggested to Richard that the Association was similar to a cooperative he would not have a bar of it. As far as he was concerned it was a group of people who have found commonalities through a process that allows those involved to remain independent yet do what they can agree to do collectively without a rigid structure such as a cooperative. I recognized that UAC had empowered these growers to come together as a group through a process that was truly systemic and it was this process that was driving the associated economic development. It was also driving social aspects (family involvement and get togethers and associate sharing of ideas) as well as environmental aspects (best practice).

What UAC is effectively doing is what I have said somewhere else in this blog about what I believe is the new role of government in this day and age. UAC is tapping into and releasing the creativity that is inherently embedded in communities which in UAC's case is the collective individuals in the Maumee Valley Flower Growers Association. The inherent capacity to make dramatic improvements to social, economic and environmental situations is an untapped resource that exists in individuals, groups, and organizations within communities. The facilitative intervention of government and organizations such as universities and other change agents/organizations can release and shape that resource through systemic processes. Systemic process is what is required to deal with the complexity of the many problems of today.



**The beautiful colors of the poinsettias at Greenhouse Acres Ltd**

A highlight of my visit to Toledo was that I was invited to give a talk on my work in Sydney and what I had learnt from my Churchill study tour in the Toledo Public Library.

A link to the invitation of the event can be found by clicking here:

<http://uac.utoledo.edu/What%20Works/ww-flyer-11-27-06.pdf>.

Among those who attended were Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur and Lucas County Commissioner Pete Gerken. Congresswoman Kaptur is the longest current serving woman in the US Congress. She is in her 12th two year term and is a champion of urban agriculture. It was a pleasure to meet and talk with her.



**Talking with Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur and Commissioner Pete Gerken**

I also had meetings with many other people including those I met on field visits. I will provide information on those meetings and what some people in particular are doing in due course. In the mean time the following sites provide some details of my visit:

The UAC record of my visit - <http://uac.utoledo.edu/What%20Works/Mason-11-27-06/ww-11-27-06.htm>; and The research website for the UAC project - [www.ohiogreenhouse.com](http://www.ohiogreenhouse.com)