

ANONYMOUS QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES

The Way to Wanakena

Kristin V. Rehder

Exhibit opening, September 1, 2012, SUNY-ESF Ranger School:

- 150 attendees (estimated)
- 118 for the remarks (actual count)
- 88 returned questionnaires (actual count)

Responses to the questionnaires by the numbers:

- **Total:** 88 returned questionnaires (*not all categories were filled out on each form; however, for consistency 88 is used below as the basis for percentages*)
- **By age:**

up to 19:	2 (<1%)
20-39:	4 (<1%)
40-59:	31 (35%)
60-79:	46 (52%)
80 and above:	2 (<1%)
- **By number of years in Wanakena:**

up to 10:	22 (25%)
10-19:	20 (22%)
20-39:	15 (17%)
40-59:	6 (<1%)
60 or more:	3 (<1%)
- **By residency:**

year-round:	26 (30%)
seasonal:	35 (40%)
neighboring community:	10 (11%)
visitor:	11 (12%)

Note: A copy of the questionnaire is attached as an addendum.

Responses to the questionnaires by questions asked:

- **To what extent does seeing the portraits and comments in *The Way to Wanakena* influence how you feel about participating with others in addressing community issues?**
1. The response was almost 100% positive and included “very willing,” “strongly,” “very much encouraged to do a lot more,” “compelled,” “want to participate more,” and “opens that door further.”
 2. The sole negative response was from a visitor to Wanakena: “It still feels overwhelmingly complicated.” (60-79 years old, visiting, in area 56 years—*example of data existing in records for each response:*)
 3. At least two responses directly addressed personal divisions that may exist, and one noted an attitudinal shift:
 - “It makes me ashamed of the negative feelings I have toward some Wanakenians.”
 - “I have softened to some members of the community.”
 4. One person deferred responsibility:
 - “As a seasonal resident, it is difficult to know my role; I look to the year-rounders—I have great respect for them.”
 5. At least three respondents cited an existing level of personal activism, yet credited the exhibit for reinforcing their position or enabling them to know that others share their position, as in the two examples below:
 - “Participation has always been part of my nature and profession. *The Way to Wanakena* reinforces and makes me appreciate my beliefs.”
 - “I’ve always felt it was important, but it is especially interesting to see how committed others are.”
 6. One person, who is in the 60-79 age bracket, said: “The portraits and comments remind me of the importance of community involvement—somewhat new for me.”
 7. Some respondents noted benefits from the exhibit, as in: being reminded to “slow down and take time to appreciate living here”; gaining “a whole new concept on photography and photos—wow!”; and “*The Way to Wanakena* makes me proud to be a member of this community.”

- **What are the specific issues you feel are important to work on as a community?**

Note: During the opening remarks, before the questionnaires were completed, Kristin presented a summary of the concerns that the 34 project participants cited most often in their interviews. The top four concerns were: 1) attracting more year-rounders and families with kids (in this category are the many related subsets: affordable housing, desirable and available property, jobs, quality education, technology, and keeping the hospital); 2) the difficulty of running a business or doing business in Wanakena, with issues such as remoteness, technology, resistance to development, difficulty of attracting new business); 3) people bringing city ways to the country or wanting city conveniences; and 4) not wanting too many people to discover Wanakena or for Wanakena to expand too much. Following the exhibit and remarks, it is interesting to compare that first set of data with questionnaire answers to the question: What are the specific issues you feel are important to work on as a community? Numbers 3 and 4 above are practically non-existent in the questionnaire responses, but an added issue of respecting each other and welcoming diversity now ranks at the top of the list with economic sustainability; a close second is pulling together, cooperation, and staying together when times are tough. This information suggests that the exhibit material and remarks had a demonstrable effect on viewers.

1. Two categories of responses each received 15 mentions from respondents:
 - Economic sustainability and development; keeping local businesses, institutions, and services in business (Pinecone, general store, Packbasket, Ranger School, post office, concerts on the green); and ensuring employment. Two comments in this category extended the concern to the Clifton-Fine area and across the Adirondacks. Note: As is the case with all other questions, answers came from a cross-section of the respondents in terms of year-rounders and seasonals with varying lengths of years in Wanakena, and from visitors and members of neighboring communities.
 - Acceptance of each other, tolerance, respect, open-mindedness, and welcoming diversity and diverse histories. As noted above, this is a major addition to the outcomes of the project. One respondent wrote: “We are one.” Another wrote: “Avoid fear and exclusion.”
2. A third significant category of response (12 mentions) centered on a sense of family, cooperation, pulling together, staying together in tough times, and relying on community and neighbors in a remote area to “get us through.” One person noted the importance of “understanding how each of us can impact the other.” Another mentioned “maintaining the small family feeling.”
3. Education was a notable category with 8 specific comments, including: improving school curricula, creating competitive education that incorporates technology, and increasing respect for teachers.
4. Under environment, 7 responses mentioned: preserving the beauty and well being of the environment, supporting “forever wild,” managing development with regard to the forest and water, and protecting the wilderness.

5. The next highest response area related to keeping Wanakena, Wanakena. Responses included: preserving our richness and heritage; maintaining our character while also maintaining our economic viability; preserving older structures; and “keeping Wanakena interesting to its children so they take part in maintaining its character.”
6. In total, there were specific issues of concern mentioned in over 30 separate categories. In addition to those noted above, the categories included, but were not limited to: attracting young families, striking the right balance in year-rounders and seasonals, developing a future vision for Wanakena, keeping Wanakena safe, continuing to support community events so that we get to know each other, creating positive relationships with neighboring communities, and involvement of the church in the town.

• **If this project and presentation were repeated, what would you change?**

1. The most common response to this question was “nothing.” Attendees gave very positive marks overall to the project and presentation.
2. The most common suggestion was to present photos in the talk, especially to demonstrate examples of social activist photography.
3. The second most common suggestion was to try to photograph additional members of the community, for example: everyone, some older members who were not included, or a second round of 34 people in a representative mix.
4. At least two respondents wanted to see representation from neighboring communities.
5. Another category of response related to audience participation: time for Q&A or hearing from those photographed/interviewed about their experiences.
6. Establishing a preference that photographic portraiture should be a perceived direct “likeness” of the subjects and their personalities, one person suggested taking pictures of people as they are, specifically mentioning “glasses” and “grumpiness.” Note: This would be an interesting discussion point as it engages the issue of representation and interpretation by the artist, subject, and viewer.
7. Several requests were made, including: to publish a book of the project, to post questionnaire results on the website, and to shorten the text.
8. A number of suggestions have influenced plans for the second exhibit and gallery talk on October 18, such as: providing more history on Wanakena; including a Q&A (in Wanakena, due to scheduling constraints, Kristin offered to answer questions individually); and giving a more specific explanation of how each person was chosen.

- **Any additional comments?**
 1. There is a clear desire among some respondents to see the project develop further: “You did a great job of starting the community discussion. What’s next?” Or, “How can you insure follow through?” Or, “Please continue!!”
 2. Some people reframed *The Way to Wanakena* in their own words in ways that reflect their understanding and assimilation of the project’s stated purpose. (Note: Had it not been for the questionnaires, this social-activist effect would not have been readily apparent.) “The portraits and comments connect disparate generations and segments of the community and further a sense of community among those who view them. As such, the images work to motivate individuals to act on community issues.”
 3. A number of respondents commented on the universality of the project and its applicability to other areas: “I have the feeling that this should be done in every community.” And, “The portraits truly show the diversity of the Wanakena community and show that the community concerns are universal.” And the prompt: “Share the community spirit of Wanakena—the spirit of selflessness as opposed to selfishness—with the rest of civilization.”
 4. One person made a notable admission, which, given more time, could have led to an interesting discussion on one of the exhibit’s cornerstones: “I still struggle with the concept of community presented through individuals.”
 5. One person noted that, as a result of the show, he/she wants to make Wanakena a permanent residence.
 6. Accolades to the artist abounded in this section related to the quality of the photographs, the love and respect shown for the people and place, the gift of a sense of community to Wanakena, and helping people realize how fortunate they are to live in Wanakena.
 7. Finally, one comment reinforced many others on the importance of including bios and quotes with the images: “Wanakena has always been a place of open conversation—a place where we can be free to express how we feel. Seeing these pictures made it seem as though the conversation was taken to a whole new level because it was put in print.”

Prepared by:
Kristin V. Rehder
9/23/12
www.kvrehder.com

