**INTERN PROGRAM**

**LOPEZ COMMUNITY LAND TRUST**

Rhea Miller, Assistant Director

Lopez Community Land Trust (LCLT) offers construction internships for the building of affordable housing. Interns are required to work with the homeowners, volunteers, and professional carpenters. They must commit to a minimum of 6 weeks, 4 eight hour shifts. They are required to put a fifth day into working for their host family, which usually involves gardening. Many interns stay longer, some as much as 6 months.

The interns learn about our program from the posting on our website. New interns often come after hearing about the program from other interns. They are looking for life skills and meaningful work, either during their summer break as students, or as graduates while unable to find employment. They usually are not looking to continue a career in the trades of construction.

LCLT hires a construction supervisor that is also capable of teaching. All new tasks are taught. Intern tasks may include preparing forms for concrete, foundation pouring and finishing, framing, roofing with metal roofing, sheathing, sheeting, installation of solar panels, insulating, blocking, finish trim, painting, strawbale construction, etc. The interns do not do electric installation and plumbing, due to our code and licensing requirements, nor do they perform mudding and taping. All teaching is hands-on. There is an occasional classroom session for reading floorplans, budgeting and scheduling, and storm water controls on site. We also occasionally do classroom sessions if requested by an intern. Safety is taught throughout the season, for both tools and site arrangement. Recycling procedures and daily clean-up are stressed.

Each day begins with a circling of participants, during which the construction supervisor lays out the day’s tasks and divides responsibilities. Interns are constantly encouraged to do more than they expect that they are capable of. Lunch is provided, with the construction supervisor and project manager present. The lunch times are important for sharing the vision of the project, hearing interns’ dreams for their own lives, and bonding for teamwork on site.

Each year we receive feedback from the interns about two matters beyond their construction experience: 1) the discovery of truly living in *community* and 2) the abundance of delicious, healthy food. Interns leave here transformed. We offer what they tell us they need: 1) Meaningful work 2) Life skills for an unknown future and 3) a sense of community, of belonging. Our favorite quote comes from an architectural student, newly employed in an architectural firm in the Bay area, who returned for a visit this year: “I came here wanting to be an architect of buildings. I left here wanting to become an architect of community.”

The Common Ground construction project of 11 homes, an office and two apartments, involved 60 interns from around the world. Last year we constructed 4 net-zero homes of affordable housing with 9 interns. The project, known as *Tierra Verde*, utilizes grid tied solar electric installations. The *Tierra Verde* interns included more college graduates than college students. We do not ask ages, but the average age this season seemed to be 24. The experience of these interns ranged from some experience on the farm to never having held a tape measurer in her hand.

The following is feedback from 2013 interns.

Here I am after a long summer of hard and beautiful work. The garden is full and thriving and I feel the same way. This place has changed my life and reminded me I can do anything when I put my mind to it and with a little help from friends and community. I want to bring this experience home and spread the “community” part of it.

**Luke, physics major** @20 years old

I have been surprised at how cohesive the experience has been with the rest of the community. I expected to be more isolated. I have been surprised by the amount of confidence put into us. The teaching is impressive. I knew I was a fast learner but am surprised what has come from my efforts. I enjoyed explaining to the agriculture intern what all I have done. I’ve been surprised by how comfortable I’ve been made to feel and how fast the integration of knowledge has been. I have been really pleased with our access to Sandy and Rhea [Director and Assistant Director]….

I am enjoying all the steps of learning. I want to be able to explain what I’m learning to others. I like being able to take the lead after I’ve learned something. I’m not too sure where I’m going. I’m excited by the concept of design. I’d really like to learn more about how to create something like this. Would love to take the seminar “Seven Lessons for Leaders in Systems Change.” I don’t even know what all I can learn here. I am often out of my element. I’ll go back to California to my own life. I want to build community somewhere there.

**Hannah, college graduate** @27 years old

I’m surprised by how much goes into building a house…. I’ve been surprised at how so community centered it is. I plan to use this experience to make me a better civil engineer. I would love to stay longer. It’s been a great experience.

**Zach**, 18 years old, entering college

I have been surprised by the amount of confidence and trust in us. I am surprised by how much I learn everyday, about how much in a week I can learn…. I feel like the women are treated as equals with the men.

**Sprout, college graduate** @24 years old

After this I want to continue working on projects, helping others. I want more experience, and apply this learning to other things.

**Francesco, college graduate** @24 years old

I have been surprised by how productive of a learning environment this is. This experience is very conducive to learning. Pamela [construction supervisor] is great.

**Tony, college graduate** @ 27 years old

It’s been a big thing to take on construction—the amount of new knowledge and information, and the amount of passion around it. I’d like to do more design but don’t know enough to even ask questions. I keep using the power tools to gain confidence with them. I want to learn whatever comes my way. I'm out of my comfort zone. I don’t know so much, but it’s good for my character building…. As a teacher, it is really interesting being on this side of the teaching experience. I plan to use this experience around my own house. It’s another layer added to my world, demystifying building. I’ve got the basic concepts. I’d like to build a Tiny House, maybe a shed in the backyard. I have more tools in my toolbelt.

**Claire, teacher** @ 24 years old

I’m surprised by how much has gotten done with unskilled labor. It’s been only 7 weeks for me, and 4 houses have been sheeted. Pamela and Coen [construction supervisor and lead carpenter] are great teachers.

**David Mondello, college graduate** @24 years old

I am surprised at how welcoming the community is—diverse and knowledgeable….The hardest part is going from blueprints to the physical.

**Jacob**, 19 years old