

Fairfax Local Currency Project-FairBuck

Bring a Local Coin to Fairfax:

Work with Town of Fairfax, Sustainable Fairfax, and Fairfax Chamber of Commerce-

This collaboration came together to get Fairfax certified as the 2nd community in the US to join an International movement of Slow Towns or CittaSlow.

Towns, chambers, and nonprofits often struggle to find unique and regular funding sources that are easy to come by, match the mission of the organization and keep money local. In economics, a local currency, in its common usage, is a currency not backed by a national government (and not necessarily legal tender), and intended to trade only in a small area. As a tool of fiscal localism, local moneys can raise awareness of the state of the local economy, especially among those who may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with traditional bartering. These currencies are also referred to as community currency, and are a form of alternative currency or complementary currency.

Advocates of local currency, argue that this enables an economically cool region to pull itself up by giving the people living there a medium of exchange that they can use to exchange services and locally-produced goods. In a broader sense, this is the original purpose of all money. Local currencies also tend to operate in relatively small geographic regions and encourage recycling and reducing the amount of carbon emissions from the transportation and manufacture of goods. As a result, they are part of the economic strategy of many green and sustainable-living groups.

Sustainable Fairfax wants to take advantage of an existing coalition to bring a local currency project to Fairfax.

Project challenge & benefit — Bring all players on board, create, and find funding for the minting of FairBucks that will benefit each of the players and bring funding to CittaSlow Initiatives.

The goal of this project is to *follow the model of the West Marin coin to fund CittaSlow and other localization initiatives in Fairfax, Ca. They minted 10,000 coins for \$10,000 dollars but designated the coins to be worth \$3 dollars in trade. This allows \$2 from each coin "sold" to be reinvested back into the coffers of the collaborators.*



The Shape of the Project currently includes the following:

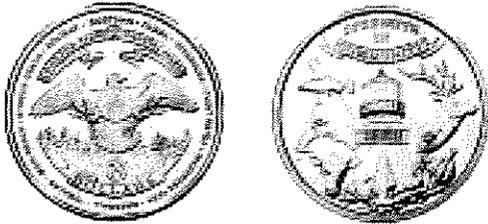
- Reaching out to Town of Fairfax Council Members and the Chamber of Commerce to become partners with Sustainable Fairfax in this effort and to designate where the funds will be spent. **Sustainable Fairfax** board members have agreed to this and chosen to dedicate funds to localization projects and CittaSlow.
- Ask each collaborator to invest \$4,000 into the FairBuck project, totaling \$12,000. Budget- \$10,000 for minting and \$2,000 for promotion and administration.
- Work with a local artist to design a Fairfax coin and create flyers to help sell the coin.
- Approach local businesses to get them to sign on to the project by stating that they are willing to exchange US dollars for FairBucks.
- Promote the FairBuck with a media blitz.
- Document project for the purpose of creating a model for other U.S. CittaSlow communities.

Environmental Forum of Marin Project- This project has **been approved** as an official project for class #38 of EFM's Sustainable Earth Forum students working on the project include, Pam Hartwell-Herrero, David Bernard, Polla Pratt, and Karin Conn. These students have set a goal of getting buy in from Sustainable Fairfax, Fairfax Chamber of Commerce and Fairfax Town Council, designing and minting the first batch of coins, and handling a marketing campaign as well as creating informational materials and a website for the promotion of the FairBuck. The project deadline is April 2011.

West Marin's \$3 tokens cost \$1 to make - with profit going to charities

Rob Rogers

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Front and back view of the new Coastal Marin Trade Tokens, worth \$3 in trade at participating businesses in the villages of coastal Marin. The tokens were designed by Bolinas wildlife artist Keith Hansen. (Photo provided by Coastal Marin Fund)

Many people say they want to create change, but Richard Kirschman actually mints it. The resident of tiny Dogtown in West Marin hopes the change he's created - shiny brass \$3 coins showing up in change tills and tip jars throughout coastal West Marin - will help bring the region together while generating cash for local charities.

"The objective is to have these coins become common currency within our 10 villages," said Kirschman, who is retired - although he describes his occupation as "dealing with things as they come up."

A 35-year resident of his village, Kirschman created the coins - properly known as mercantile trade tokens - as a way to get the 2.5 million tourists who visit West Marin each year to contribute to the region's schools, food banks, artists' organizations and other community groups.

"There are a lot of nonprofits trying to do good work out here," Kirschman said. "But there are only 2,300 households in coastal Marin, and those same 2,300 households provide the membership and most of the contributions for those organizations, and they're the people who attend all the fundraising events that occur throughout the year. At the same time, we have 2.5 million tourists passing through our communities who go untouched."

Kirschman's concept is simple. The tokens, which cost \$1 to make, are sold to residents and local merchants at a cost of \$3 each. The U.S. currency from that sale goes into a bank account, where it becomes the basis for a charitable trust, the Coastal Marin Fund. The tokens then go into circulation; they can be used for purchases or redeemed for cash at a growing number of businesses in Bolinas, Olema and Point Reyes Station. Yet Kirschman hopes many of the coins will go out of circulation, taken home by tourists looking for a keepsake from their visit to West Marin.

"If people come from around the world, get these \$3 pieces and take them home, then every \$2 of that \$3 is basically found money for the foundation and for West Marin nonprofits," said Jon Hyde, owner of Flower Power in Bolinas and one of the first shopkeepers to adopt the local currency. "The profit comes as the coins fall out of circulation."

To make the coins attractive, Kirschman commissioned Bolinas artist Keith Hansen to incorporate iconic images of West Marin into their design. Hansen, a wildlife artist who is illustrating a guide to the birds of the Sierra Nevada, began with a picture of one of the area's most popular birds: the osprey.

"I wanted it to look like a real coin - but instead of a bald eagle with a shield, there's an osprey, one of the world's most cosmopolitan bird species, and instead of clutching arrows, the bird is holding pencils in one claw and paintbrushes in the other," Hansen said.

Hansen's bird is surrounded by the names of 10 coastal communities. The reverse of the coin features the Point Reyes Lighthouse superimposed over an image of the coast and flanked by pictures of a coho salmon, Tule elk, a cow and what Hansen describes as a "cornucopia" of local vegetables.

"When tourists examine the coin, they'll see the iconography of what brought them to West Marin in the first place," Kirschman said. "There's a cow, the product of our ranchers; a lot of vegetables, the produce of our farmers; our lighthouse, an Indian arrowhead based on one Keith got from the museum and an elk."

In addition to what Kirschman calls a West Marin motto - "Strength in Community" - the coins bear the legend "Good For Trade in Coastal Marin." It's that phrase that distinguishes the tokens from legal tender, and helps to make their use and exchange permissible, Hansen said.

"Trade tokens are as American as apple pie," Kirschman said. "There have been thousands of them, and some are highly specialized - good only at a particular brothel in Louisiana or a single town. Some are worth hundreds as collectors' items."

A spokesman for the U.S. Secret Service, which investigates currency-related crimes, said it was unlikely the tokens would present a problem, as they are clearly distinct from federal currency.

"Where we would get involved was if someone was counterfeiting coins, which is really rare," said Charles White, special agent in charge of the Secret Service's San Francisco office, who said he had not heard of a similar exchange program in another town or region.

"Only in Marin," White said.

Kirschman donated \$10,000 of his own money to mint the first \$30,000 worth of tokens, sending Hansen's design to a sculptor in Seattle, who hand-carved an 8-inch plaster version of the coin. That plaster cast traveled to Los Angeles, where a master diemaker converted it to a die; the final coins were stamped from solid brass by a private mint in Ohio.

During their first week in circulation, Hyde estimates that he sold - or rather, exchanged - 120 of the tokens to interested customers.

"Most of the people who want them are just curious about them. But there have been locals who purchased up to 10 hoping to use them," Hyde said. "One person came in, bought some, and immediately went down to the bakery.

"The bakery hadn't seen them before, but they took them," Hyde said. "This community is very community-minded - and very open-minded about stuff."

COASTAL MARIN FUND'S LOCAL CURRENCY WILL BENEFIT LOCAL NON-PROFITS

There are approximately 2300 households in the 10 villages of Coastal Marin. It is from these families that the non-profit organizations of West Marin receive much of their financial support—through membership dues, individual contributions, and fundraising events. In effect, our non-profits are all fishing in the same pond to finance their good works. The new West Marin \$3.00 coin, good only in the 10 villages that comprise coastal Marin county in California, is a plan designed to include the 2 million-plus visitors who annually pass our way in financing these organizations.

Here's how it works: All of us who want to help, merchants and individuals alike, will exchange some of their greenbacks for these \$3.00 coins, and then begin spending them to buy things and to make change, just as if they were real currency.

Visitors will inevitably run into the tokens as they shop and dine. As you can see, the coins depict many of the things travelers have come to see: elk, coho salmon, the products of our ranches and farms, our ridgelines and beaches, an osprey with the brushes and pens of our artists and writers in its talons. The coin was designed by internationally-known Bolinas wildlife artist Keith Hansen, and makes an inexpensive, and we hope irresistible, memento of a visit to coastal Marin. The coins cost about \$1.00 each to mint. So for each one taken home to Des Moines, Tokyo, or Berlin, the Coastal Marin Fund will have banked \$2.00 on behalf of our local non profits. If just 100,000 people remove a coin from circulation, that will leave \$200,000 in the Fund, and if 300,000 out of more than 2,000,000 visitors take home a coin—you do the math. A committee of local volunteers will periodically decide how funds will be distributed.

Everything is completely voluntary. No one is required to accept the coins or use them. But we hope everyone will. Think of this as West Marin's own Community Chest, one that earns the money it gives away.

Some merchants have asked what happens if their cash registers clog up with coins. We think eventually the opposite will be true—the coins will be hard to find and we'll know it's time to mint some more. But merchants can trade back coins for dollars at any time by [contacting us](#).

So far, where to find, trade, and/or use West Marin currency for cash:

- *In Point Reyes:* Flower Power, Zuma, Black Mountain Artisans, [Point Reyes Books](#), Cabaline Country Emporium and Saddlery, West Marin Community Services office, Point Reyes Hostel, Sation House Cafe, Garden of Eden Apothecary, West Marin Pharmacy, Shorty's Golden Point Produce (in the Creamery building), Hearth and Harvest, [Gallery Route One](#), [Toby's Feed Barn](#), View Points Gallery, and [Epicenter](#); and at the farmer's market: Wild West Ferments, Wedgewood Organic Baker, Wild Blue Farms, Paradise Valley Farms, Toby's Coffee Bar;
- *In Inverness Park* at Perry's Deli and [Abalone Inn](#);
- *In Inverness* at [Drakes Bay Oyster Farm](#);
- *In Dogtown* at [Woodville Ranch](#);
- *In Stinson Beach* at Claudia Chapline Gallery, [Crickets at the Beach](#), Stinson Beach Market, Flying Pig Ranch, Meristem, Parkside Cafe, [Live Water Surf Shop](#), Healing Arts Center, and at Stinson Beach Books;
- *In Bolinas* at Calpestri Business Solutions above the museum, [Keith Hansen's studio](#) in the museum courtyard, the Bolinas General Store, Bolinas People's Store, Las Baulines Nursery, Odyssey Video, Parrots' Cove, [Coast Cafe](#), [Smiley's Bar](#), [the Surf Shop](#), Bikes, Surf & Skate, and Chameleon.
- *In Tomales* at Tomales Deli and Cafe.
- *In Marshall* at [The Marshall Store](#), with more establishments coming on board every week.