

September-October  
2023

Vol. 58 No. 4



Newsletter of **LEPOCO**  
Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

## Jefferson Vitelli: Presente! \_\_\_\_\_

Jefferson Vitelli, a leader in local peace activism for decades died on August 21, 2023, after a months-long struggle with Guillain-Barré syndrome. He is and will continue to be missed by LEPOCO friends and by this organization where he contributed so much persistent, creative work for peace.

Jeff's peace witness began while he was a student at Lafayette College. He joined weekly community vigils in Center Square, Easton, opposing the war in Vietnam.

He brought so many talents to his peace work and infused his counseling career with his strong sense of justice and peace.

His writing and drawing talent led him to create "The ABC's of Broken Bombers," a coloring book that was a work of art and an educational tool. Each page featured a letter of the alphabet, a topic and a related drawing – A is for Art..., J is for Jobs..., N is for Nonviolence... Jeff wrote that each topic represented what we could support if our government would stop spending tax dollars on "bombs and other things that kill people and other living things." The coloring book came out at the 1976 Peace Conversion Fair in Bethlehem, for which Jeff had designed the poster.

His musical and poetry talent came forward with the Muhlenberg V song written about the arrest of Tim Laidman, Mike Schlosser, Nancy Tate, Barbara Andrews, and Jeff for their protest of FBI spying on LEPOCO and others on the occasion of FBI Director Clarence Kelly's talk at Muhlenberg College in 1976. Thanks to the admirable work of the then young attorney Donald Miles and many supporters the case ultimately became a strong affirmation of First Amendment rights at the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

In a similar vein Jeff wrote "Dam the Army Corps of Engineers" in 1978, expressing opposition to the Corps efforts to build dams like Trexler and Harmony in the Lehigh Valley area. (Trexler was not built, Harmony was.)

In 1979 he and his family joined the evacuation to Virginia by a group of LEPOCO members literally and symbolically fleeing possible radiation releases after the Three Mile Island nuclear plant accident.

Jeff sang with and helped lead the LEPOCO Peace Singers from the time of their founding in the 1980s – often accompanying the group on his guitar.

Jeff was a gardener – putting this skill to use maintaining the flowers around the Peace Pole in Bethlehem's Rose Garden Park.

During the wars in Central America in the 1980s he joined a solidarity delegation to El Salvador carrying humanitarian aid.

Jeff covered all manner of peace and justice issues in his regular "The Struggle Shared" column in the LEPOCO Newsletter. He wrote poetry including an annual holiday greeting full of news about his life and his wishes for the world.

He worked as a trauma therapist and a lovely poem about one man he encountered in that work was read at his memorial service.

He was a punster and a wordsmith. He came up with the current name for LEPOCO's film and talks series, "Reels & Spiels."

His published obituary said, "Many of his talents were directed toward healing the planet. He was passionate about working for peace, justice, and equality. He felt a deep stewardship of the planet, was a protector of all animals and felt a deep connection to nature."

He wrote a fund appeal letter for LEPOCO only weeks before he became ill. It closed: "I have this recurring image that we are all walking along a razor's edge trail with dangerous precipices on either side – nuclear annihilation, climate change, pandemics, disinformation... We can't turn back, there are too many people behind us. We can only move forward with careful measured steps. I know that eventually the ridge levels off into a broad plateau where we will meet as a united human race, and we'll talk it out.

"The thing that keeps me going, that keeps us going, dear friends, is that we are singing with the LEPOCO Peace Singers, '...I dreamed the world had all agreed. To put an end to war...' Let's keep on singing the dream."

Jeff's family, Carol, Chandra, his grandchildren, and the larger family circle held a memorial service for Jeff on September 9, attended by his LEPOCO friends and many others. At that service Jeff's daughter, Chandra, spoke lovingly of her father – about what a creative parent he was and how he provided a safe space for her. She said that during snowstorms he would build "a snow unicorn for me instead of a snowman." And she described a last adventure with her father and her children, his grandchildren, before he became ill. He took them "kayaking at night on Lake Nockamixon" with lanterns.

We are grateful to Jefferson Vitelli for his many efforts for peace and justice and his many gifts to the LEPOCO community and the larger community.

- Nancy Tate

# Roots of LEPOCO

The LEPOCO website provides a rich history of the first thirty years of LEPOCO, thanks to the work of Tom Stinnett in compiling the myriad activities for peace.

A thread throughout the Third Ten Years recounts the LEPOCO work on behalf of Central America. Demonstrations, protests, arrests, and sit-ins on behalf of Nicaragua, El Salvador, Panama, and Honduras punctuated these efforts.

Early in the decade, Nicaraguan contra aid was a critical focus. In 1987, Nancy Tate and the late Joe DeRaymond stood trial for their participation in a U.S. Capitol Rotunda demonstration against contra aid. "They spent six long weeks traveling to D.C. every week."

In 1988, over 50 people gathered on short notice to protest an invasion of Honduras by 3500 U.S. troops. LEPOCO joined in a demonstration against the involvement of PA National Guard in Central America and in a Pentagon action against U.S. policy in Central America.

Moving into 1989, LEPOCO continued the Central America focus. Jeff Vitelli joined a caravan to El Salvador to ensure delivery of medical, school, and food supplies to earthquake victims.

In 1990, the concerns shifted to the invasion of Panama with Nancy Tate visiting Panama, Guatemala and El Salvador. The 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the assassination of El Salvador's Archbishop Oscar Romero was marked by a march and rally in D.C. with 12 LEPOCO members arrested along with more than 500 other people.

Keeping Central America in sharp focus was the Americas Solidarity Group, a LEPOCO committee, that, sadly, has not met since 2019. Concerns in Central and South America continue and could be addressed by reviving the Solidarity Group.

- Janet Ney

## Teaching Peace, All the World Around!



Peace-Camp 2023 was everything we hoped it could be. We had good enrollment with nearly 45 children, we had just enough staff with some great new folks, and even the weather cooperated with us. We were all grateful for Margot Hillman's leadership one more time. The young campers enjoyed the ever popular "specials": music with Roberta Meek, drumming with Karen Bedics, special needs awareness with Karen Larssen and Philomena Gruppo, and active non-competitive games with Margot Hillman and Regina Sherrer.

Each morning, campers were greeted and proceeded to their group tables where Lynn Donnelly had set up simple arts and crafts projects.

Donna Hartmann came Wednesday morning and told a story about her Peace Garden, which many campers talked about for the rest of the week.

Who is still singing, "There Was a Moose"? How about "Teaching Peace, All the World Around"?

- Marcie Lightwood

\*\*\*See some of the photographs from camp, taken by Susie Ravitz, on page 3!!!



### Help Wanted - Assistance Needed

*LEPOCO is seeking talented volunteers to conduct important activities by serving on a fundraising committee. We are looking for creative, hard-working individuals dedicated to the goals and mission of this peace organization. Do you have the interest and the skills? For more information or to volunteer, contact the LEPOCO Peace Center, 610-691-8730 or [lepoco@fast.net](mailto:lepoco@fast.net).*

### Newsletter of LEPOCO

Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

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The LEPOCO Newsletter is published eight times a year by the Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern, a nonviolent, non-profit organization dedicated to peace in all forms.

#### Annual dues are:

Regular Member .....	\$35
Limited Income Member .....	\$10
Household Membership .....	\$45
Supporting Member .....	\$75

Articles/news should be submitted to one of the addresses above for consideration for the next issue of the newsletter.

Newsletter Staff: Tom Stinnett, Nancy Tate, Amanda Zaniesienko, Carol Baylor, Janet Ney, Rick Dow.

Thanks to all the people who collate and prepare the newsletter for mailing each month.

LEPOCO Steering Committee: Pam Brubaker, Margot Hillman, Julius Iwantsch (co-treasurer), Mohammed Khaku (ex-officio), Monica McAghon, Martricia McLaughlin, Janet Ney, Susie Ravitz, Stefan Rogers, Tom Stinnett (co-treasurer), Nancy Tate (ex-officio), and Amanda Zaniesienko.

# Young People Making Peace Summer Day Camp 2023



Peace Camp 2023 - July 24-29

1. Green Group

2. Singing "We Come From the Mountain"

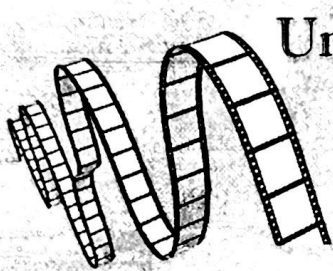
3. Yellow Group



4. Blue Group

5. Gathering together at the end of a FUN day!

6. Purple Group

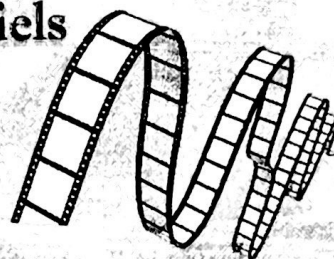


## Underground Reels & Spiels

Friday, October 20, 7:00 pm

Screening of

**"Matewan"**



This wrenching historical drama recounts the true story of a West Virginia coal town where the local miners struggled to form a union. Their struggle rose to the pitch of all-out war in 1920. When Matewan's miners go on strike, a union organizer arrives in town to help them, uniting workers white and black, Appalachian-born and immigrant, while urging patience in the face of the coal company's violent provocations. The cracker-jack ensemble cast includes James Earl Jones, David Strathairn, Chris Cooper, and Mary McDonnell -- with Oscar-nominated cinematography by Haskell Wexler.

Written and directed by John Sayles. (1987)

132 minutes.

There will be time for discussion after the film.

Call the LEPOCO office, 610-691-8730, for more information.

## Paul Fichter: Presente!

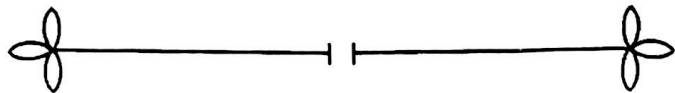
Paul Fichter of Lehighton died on June 20, 2023. Many LEPOCO members will know Paul for his activism with Veterans for Peace during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Such a kind soul, the sign that Paul made to hold for the many peace vigils during those wars read, "Stop the Wars! Please!" This remains a favorite sign at the now monthly Second Thursday Peace Vigils in Bethlehem.

Paul's peace activism began before the wars of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. His life was altered forever when he was drafted into the U.S. Army and spent a year in Vietnam. He spoke movingly about this in an interview for the WLVT series, "The War Is Still With Us," in October 2017. In a 16-minute interview Paul's words help us understand how war has a terrible impact on everyone involved. You can find the podcast by searching online for "The War Is Still With Us - Paul Fichter."

Paul was active with Vietnam Veterans Against the War after he came home. That activism included local efforts and his participation in the Vietnam veterans' nonviolent occupation of the Statue of Liberty in December 1971. He was one of 15 veterans who remained in the statue for two days - leaving voluntarily to avoid arrest and because their effort brought significant public attention to opposition to the Vietnam War. John Lennon and Yoko Ono sent a "Happy Xmas (war is over)" Statue of Liberty postcard to the 15 veteran occupiers.

We can be grateful to Paul for all that he did to educate others about the horrors and injustices of war.

- Nancy Tate



## Bits & Pieces

- ☮ **Fridays, September 29 & October 6, 13, 20, & 27 @ 4 pm: *Third Act Vigil for the Climate***, outside Wells Fargo Bank, 52 W. Broad St., at the corner of Broad & Guetter Sts., Bethlehem. "Elders Say Down with Oil Profiteering." Wells Fargo is one of the five major banks that invest in fossil fuel projects, including the destructive Mountain Valley Pipeline in West Virginia and Virginia. Signs will be available, or you can bring your own. Rocking chairs, walkers, canes, etc. are welcomed as props or as needed. Call Mimi Lang or LEPOCO, for more information
- ☮ **Saturday, September 30, 2-4 pm: Korea Peace Rally & March**, Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza, Ralph Bunche Park, NYC. For more information, visit [en.endthekoreanwar.net](http://en.endthekoreanwar.net).  
-2023 marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the armistice agreement between North and South Korea. Korea Peace Appeal, an international campaign, is calling for an end to the Korean War and a transition from armistice to peace beyond the Korean Peninsula.
- ☮ **Women Cross DMZ**, held alongside other organizations and individuals, in **Korea Peace Action: National Mobilization to End Korean War, July 26-28, in Washington DC**, including marches, rallies, conversations with members of congress, prayer and traditional performances.
- ☮ **Saturday, September 30, 10 am-4 pm: Peace Fair at Buckingham.** Buckingham Friends Meeting, 5684 York Rd, Lahaska, PA. LEPOCO will have a booth. Volunteers are needed. Call 610-691-8730 to volunteer or for more information.
- ☮ **October 1<sup>st</sup>, 7 pm: LEPOCO Peace Singers** will rehearse for the Peace Pilgrimage: in the nave of Rosemont Lutheran Church, 1705 W. Broad St., Bethlehem(18018). Call LEPOCO for more information.
- ☮ **October 2<sup>nd</sup> is United Nations International Day of Nonviolence and birthday of Mahatma Ghandi.**
- ☮ **October 3<sup>rd</sup> @ 7 pm: The Urgency of Pursuing Peace in Ukraine: Event with Keynote Speaker Cornell West (streaming online).** RSVP on the events page at [codepink.org](http://codepink.org).
- ☮ **Saturday, December 9: 64<sup>th</sup> Annual Nazareth to Bethlehem Christmas Peace Pilgrimage.** Visit [peacewalk.org](http://peacewalk.org) to register for more information.

# The Endangered Species Act & the Threat to Biodiversity

This year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Endangered Species Act (1973), which seeks to ensure biodiversity by protecting a list of species threatened with extinction. The list of endangered plant and animal species is maintained by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which works closely with the Environmental Protection Agency. From the outset, this law protecting biodiversity has been challenged by developers and polluters who hold that the legislation works against their economic interests. Some politicians who call themselves "conservatives" propose weakening or revoking the act, claiming it is an unreasonable burden on the property rights of landowners and businesses. By contrast, many progressives, would like to see the law strengthened by making it easier to add threatened species to the list and by mandating recovery efforts.

Those challenging a law supporting biodiversity are surely short-sighted. More is involved than simply the dismal prospect of leaving to those who come after us an impoverished natural world, one lacking the richness and variety we have enjoyed in the past. In the documentary "Breaking Boundaries: The Science of Our Planet," which LEPOCO recently screened, the scientists David Attenborough and Johan Rockström stress the practical importance of biodiversity. It is one of the key systems characterizing the relatively

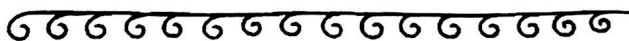


stable ecology of the planet's last 10,000 years, a stability necessary to civilized life as we know it. Biodiversity is essential to, among other things, clean air, fresh water, good quality soil, and crop pollination.

Yet biodiversity is now threatened as never before. The variety of all living things has been declining at an alarming rate. A 2019 UN report warned that a million species, out of an estimated eight million are threatened with extinction, many within a few decades. Some scientists think we are now in the middle of a "sixth mass extinction" in the planet's history. Earlier mass extinctions wiped out 60-90% of all species, and it took ecosystems millions of years to recover from these events. Most of the threats to biodiversity arise directly or indirectly from human activities - direct exploitation (hunting, over-fishing), changes in land use (deforestation, urbanization), climate change, ocean acidification, habitat reduction, and invasive species.

What can we do to mitigate the threat of species extinction and promote biodiversity? First of all, support and vote for political leaders who recognize the issue and want to do something about it, including strengthening the Endangered Species Act. In addition, we can join organizations that are campaigning to preserve species variety. For example, Extinction Rebellion US, which began in the UK and Europe, is now active here. Its ecological concerns and goals are closely linked to issues of social justice, and its web site provides information about local chapters, basic demands, and its strategy of nonviolent direct action.

- Mick Baylor



## MEETINGS... MEETINGS... MEETINGS... MEETINGS... ETC.

Tuesday, October 2, 2 pm: LEPOCO's Annual Gathering Planning Meeting via ZOOM. Call 610-691-8730, for ZOOM information.

Tuesday, October 3, 6 pm: First Tuesday LEPOCO Book Group Meeting, LEPOCO Peace Center, 1705 W. Broad St. Bethlehem (18018). The group will discuss "*Washington Bullets: A History of the CIA, Coups, & Assassinations*," by Vijay Prashad. November 7<sup>th</sup>, the book group will discuss "*The Conscience of a Liberal*," by Paul Krugman.

Monday, October 9, 7 pm: LEPOCO Monthly Action Meeting, LEPOCO Peace Center, 1705 W. Broad St., Bethlehem (18018). All members & friends are welcome at this monthly business meeting where the organization's activities are discussed. Call 610-691-8730 for more information.

Thursday, October 12, 1 pm: Underground Reels & Spiels Planning Meeting via ZOOM. Call 610-691-8730, for more information.

Saturday, October 14 : Gather at 8:15 am, Ride/Walk starts at 9 am: LEPOCO's Bike/Walk-A-Thon, starting and ending outside at the LEPOCO Peace Center on the campus of Rosemont Lutheran Church, 1705 W. Broad St., Bethlehem. A brochure/pledge sheet is enclosed in this newsletter. Call LEPOCO (610-691-8730) for information and more brochures. Please join us. You can self-pledge, but we hope you will ask friends, neighbors, and co-workers to support your walk or ride.

*Please join in the work of these groups as you are able. If you want more information about the meetings of the Newsletter Planning Group, the Peace Camp Planning Committee, or any other committees, please call LEPOCO at 610-691-8730. For a regularly updated calendar of events, see [www.lepoco.org](http://www.lepoco.org) or read LEPOCO Email Updates.*



# LEPOCO

Lehigh-Pocono Committee of Concern

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## See Inside:

### Page 1

- Jefferson Vitelli: Present!

### Page 2

- Roots of LEPOCO
- Teaching Peace All The World Around
- Help Wanted

### Page 3

- Peace Camp Photo Page

### Page 4

- Underground Reels & Spiels
- Paul Fichter: Present!
- Some Bits & Some Pieces

### Page 5

- The Endangered Species Act & the Threat to Biodiversity
- Meetings...Meetings ...Meetings...

### Insert

- Bike/Walk-A-Thon Brochure

## Monthly Peace Vigil

(Second Thursdays)

October 12, 4:30-5:30 pm

November 9, 4-5 pm

*End the wars.*

*Witness for peace.*

3<sup>rd</sup> & Wyandotte Sts.,  
(south) Bethlehem

Call LEPOCO, 610-691-8730, for more info.

## Underground Reels & Spiels

Friday, October 20, 7 pm

Screening of

**"Matewan"**

Join us for the screening & discussion.

LEPOCO Peace Center  
1705 W. Broad St., Bethlehem

(See page 4 for more info.)

## Bike/Walk-A-Thon

Saturday, October 14

Time to start getting people to  
sponsor your walk or ride!

(see insert.)

"When the power of  
love overcomes the love  
of power, the world will  
know peace."

— Jimi Hendrix