

Koinonia plans 300-acre art resort



Photos by Timothy Meinch

Tabla drummer Brian Festa hopes his Koinonia house will provide the community with a way to cultivate new avenues for artistic discovery.

Musician promotes an isolated dome house for ambitious art-

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Some say life is a song. For Brian Festa, music is the basic building block of life and all existence, which he shares with others through Koinonia.

The Greek word Koinonia means community, spiritual relationship or a contract between two or more people, and appears more than 100 times in the Bible. While Festa experiences Koinonia every day through his music, relationships with others and meditation, he wants to teach and share it with others in a more permanent community setting.

"Koinonia is a group of innovative people working together to co-create music awareness and sacred arts," 25-year-old Festa said. "The vision is to implement these ideas in a small artist community on a self-sustaining piece of land, where people may come to nurture their craft and themselves."

The educational system today is formed around convenience for teachers, rather than developing the student as a person, according to Festa. Koinonia's alternative education methods develop the student

as an individual, teaching life perception and decision-making skills, from a musical core.

"We have vibrations, causing frequencies, music, vibrations and strings," Festa said. "Music is us, we are music, we are vibrating."

In his music lessons, Festa focuses on teaching improvisation. The Lancaster, Pa., native said the ability to improvise is a life skill that flows outside of music and into all aspects of life.

"That's why I use the word co-creation, because we're all vibrating together and when we create music together it creates resonance on a universal plane through a universal language," he said.

This philosophy extends far beyond the realm of music and education, defining history, humanity and the universe for Festa and many others.

"Right now we're at a particularly critical, important point in the world and in the universe," Festa said. "This is the time when we create a new paradigm that's fourth dimensional, more spiritual with a higher frequency, rather than second or third dimensional materialism that we live in now."

The musician is currently moving into

a geodesic-dome home 15 minutes north of Asheville, which is an exciting step for the evolution of Koinonia, after living and operating out of a west Asheville building on Haywood Road for a year and a half, Festa said.

In the 60s, a group of Warren Wilson College students constructed a geodesic dome in Barnardsville, built out of an old chicken coop. Even the bent nails were pulled out of the wood, straightened, and still hold the structure together today, according to Festa.

"They read Bucky Fuller's book of geodesic domes and came up with the geodesic dome idea," Festa said.

More than 100 wooden triangular frames geometrically fit together to form two domes, one lower than the other and connected by a midsection.

From inside the domes, the weathered, slightly rotted triangle frames reveal the unique history and expose the structure's age. The students chose the recycled wood for the Zen of it, working with an energy that was already there, according to Festa.

"When you sit in silence in this place, you can take a bite out of the silence. It is beautiful," the music teacher said. "The

acoustics are amazing."

As the new co-caretaker of the domes, he shares a common perspective on the music of life, community and education with the owner Joy Harmon.

"There have been whole books written about the pieces of the universe being music and I feel like that's probably true," 65-year-old Harmon said.

After serving in the Peace Corps and creating family learning centers in Senegal, Harmon started a private school in California with an alternative approach to education.

"It was a design with no grades or subjects but a family learning center, with five focus areas including healing arts, performing arts, science and art, adventure and survival," Harmon said.

Like Festa, Harmon places high value on music and overall personal development of the student when educating. She implements experiential, creative learning methods to education, like teaching multiplication tables with drums.

Harmon first saw the domes near Asheville in 2004 and could not ignore their educational possibilities. Now that she