

## GEORGIST BOOTH AT AFFORDABLE HOUSING CONFERENCE, SEATTLE

By Tom Gihring, Seattle

Upon receiving the notice for the Annual Statewide Affordable Housing Conference scheduled for September 20-21, 2004 in Bellevue, WA, I called the organizing team for exhibitor's information. The price was right... There were sufficient sponsors (mostly mortgage banks) to cover conference overhead, bringing the cost to non-profit exhibitors to zero. We members of the Oregon-Washington Chapter of Common Ground-USA put our heads together to assemble materials appropriate for the housing theme. Hamlet Hilpert in Centralia, WA generously contributed a \$110 matching grant, Meta Heller in Olympia provided the Georgist literature, and CG-USA President Nadine Stoner kindly shipped back issues of GroundSwell. I photocopied 16 briefs, discussion papers, and working papers mostly authored by Jeff Smith, Kris Nelson (OR Chapter) and myself. Seven of these dealt with affordable housing themes; all of them featured LVT.

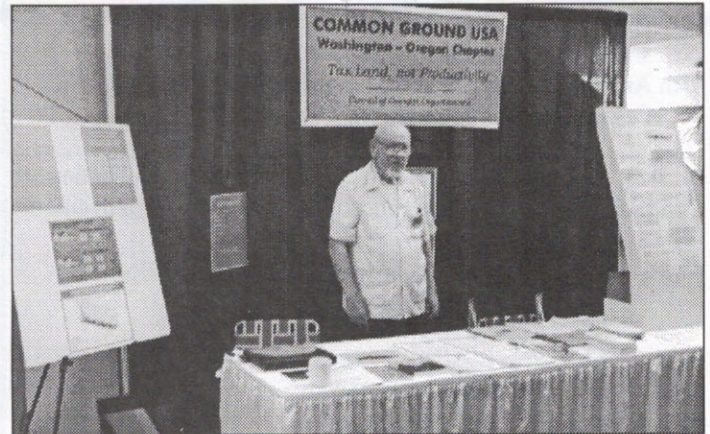
When my son Dan and I set up on Sunday afternoon, I knew we were in for an interesting time... A non-profit housing developer by the name of "Common Ground" had mistakenly taken our booth. Not to worry, their assigned booth was in the lobby across from registration and along the passage to all the conference rooms - a better location for exposure! After setting up our new Common Ground-USA banner, color-mounted placards illustrating housing and LVT themes, a newly purchased literature display, and a table covered with handout materials, I asked Dan what he thought of the exhibit. "A bit 'ghetto', Dad". Well, I suppose it didn't quite match the 3-D photo-filled high-standing color tri-folds that other booths featured, but it wasn't bad for a small grass-roots organization. I decided to make up for any aesthetic deficiencies by donning my blue blazer and power tie the next day.

Mel Forde and I staffed the booth, snagging any of the 300 or so passing conference delegates that made eye contact. Not a few started the interchange with reference to the "other Common Ground". Fortunately, quite a number of my professional colleagues were in attendance, so I could always make an entree by referring to their organization and their particular interests - linking that to the benefits of LVT. Here, I found was the key... Many local officials here are already familiar with the land tax idea, but do not necessarily make the connection with their professional roles. We would then make suggestions as to which of the papers would be of particular interest to them. (Most of the papers were written on local interest technical topics, such as "Incentive Property Taxation Can Enhance Housing Affordability", or Al Hartheimer's "Affordable Housing and the Land Tax Perspective".)

This modest effort by our OR-WA chapter is not going to produce a "groundswell" of a grass-roots appeal for a land value tax in Washington State, but it should help generate awareness among some professionals and citizen activists. When our other groundwork among state legislators begins to pay off in the form of bills (such as HJR 30 in Oregon), then we're in a better position to corral support from these

folks representing public interest organizations.

Here is an example... A tax increment financing bill is moving through the Washington state legislature. Currently, I'm working with a progressive state representative in an effort to draft a "best practice" alternative Tax Increment Finance bill that incorporates the value capture principle -- capturing land value increments rather than building values within redevelopment districts. The next week, Kris Nelson will be here for a Profitable Sustainability conference, promoting the same idea among the local delegates. Legislators always need support for the bills they introduce; these conference delegates and their organizations are potentially that support. It is important that we Georgists tune into local issues as they arise, and position ourselves to influence desirable outcomes. Hope abounds! <<



Pictured here is Mel Forde, staffing our CGUSA booth at the Affordable Housing Conference.