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# LIFE HACK 101

January 15, 2015 By CAROLINE O'CONNOR <<http://www.digportland.com/author/caroline-oconnor/>>

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## Etiquette Lessons for Sustainable Urban Living



*Mohamad Ali and Craig Saddleire at a Raise Op Board of Directors meeting*

This Friday, members of a local, sustainable living community boldly accost the growing need for safe, clean, affordable housing, and other challenges facing artists and folks just trying to get by.

That's when Portland's Dreamship community, centered at 15 Boynton Street in Parkside, will team up with sustainable organizer Craig Saddlemire to discuss the steps to becoming their own cooperative housing community.

Saddlemire, unswerving in his social organizational skills and his commitment to making co-ops work, has spearheaded two such initiatives in Lewiston, the first of which he continues to live in. The second, called Raise-Op, offers tenants clean, safe, low-income housing in downtown Lewiston, and a stake in the corporation's business model.

Raise-Op, a "cooperative affordable housing corporation," treats its customers (or, in this case, tenants) very differently than major property managers do. That's because they're turning on its head the equation that exchanges money for housing. "Instead of treating housing as a commodity to be bought and sold at the best price, we're trying to promote housing both a human right and public resource," says Saddlemire.

The language at the center of Raise-Op echoes common co-op rhetoric, but a housing cooperative is a different ball game than, say, a credit union, or a food co-op. First, there aren't many around. Second, giving people more control over their living situation means merging the roles and responsibilities of landlord and tenant. And that's what Dreamship organizers will be looking to learn how to do at Friday's event.

Dreamship's ultimate goal is to elect a board of directors and develop a set of bylaws to offer more protection to member-owners while ensuring the cooperative's future prosperity, like Raise-Op has done. Saddlemire's visit is one of many events hosted at the barn-turned-garage-turned-utopian plaza, which has been in a slow but steady state of renovation over the past four and a half years. There are pancake breakfasts, yoga classes, and potential plans to open up the front space of the house into a public art gallery. There are also 14 people living creatively within the bounds of 5,000 square feet, 12 bedrooms, and two bathrooms.

Despite differences in organizing schema, Raise-Op and Dreamship are coming together with the common interest of developing a housing model that incentivizes community work, and collective resource-sharing over trading cash for space. "When short-term gains drive the provision of such a basic necessity, then gentrification or blight can often result," says

Saddlemire, a dynamic he's said he's seen in Lewiston, and what Dreamship founder Tina Smith says she's trying to combat in Portland.

"Preserving the land in a land trust, so it's protected for affordable housing...it helps protect that space from gentrification," Tina says. "Ideally, it's the whole neighborhood." For Tina, Dreamship's becoming a co-op would dovetail with the larger goal of sustainable living.

That's also driving the Machigonne Community Land Trust, co-sponsors of Saddlemire's visit on Friday—they want to purchase land from the city to develop housing for low-income families. But for now, Dreamship is hoping to stay a venerable cog in that larger wheel by making work less of a means to an end, and more of a means in and of itself.

The idea of living is intentional at Dreamship, rather than incidental. Members take turns eating, cooking, and cleaning according to a schedule, and the group incentivizes its members to pay rent in community hours versus cash. An artist or a skilled laborer can exchange their skills as commodities to foster a clean, safe, and sober shared-living space, offering housemates a boon over how much demand there may or may not be in the local housing market.

"It's more than just renting a space with roommates," says Smith. And that's why it's worth it for Smith, a poet, to help others like herself close the gap between living and living the dream. "It sounds like a utopia, but it's working," she says.

Dreamship and Raise-Op promote an alternative to the market economy. Perhaps the biggest challenge to making housing co-ops work—or for sustainable living generally—is carving out a space in the world, where dreams can actually come true, and happiness actually is the end goal for work; for art; for sobriety. "The hope is that they share with the greater community, and the greater community will start behaving like we do," says Tina.

For the locals skeptics who can't yet swallow the idea that a utopia may exist in Portland's collective backyard, give thyself permission to pretend utopias are real. Oh, and if you get a vicious hankering for some vegan pancakes, grab yr Earth Balance and head over to Dreamship—they're eager to share them with you.

Maine Community Land Trust potluck and discussion with Craig Saddlemire | Dreamship

Collective, 15 Boynton St, Portland | 6:30-9 pm | [raiseop.com](http://raiseop.com) <<http://raiseop.com>>

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im a supporter of co-ops and especially co-operative housing... we need a new economy, built from the ground up, that dont leave anyone out or behind. and co-ops are central to this.

work that craig and many others are doing to advise and promote, facilitate and support co-operative development is so invaluable. but the primary barrier to housing is politics around land ownership, and access, not merely organizational, although organizing in new ways will help facilitate new kinds of ownership and more equitable access, we also need to secure the spaces themselves.

capitalist assumptions of property ownership, free market, if you arent paying a bank a mortgage, or paying a landlord rent, you dont have rights to house, (even though laws are not so clear on this, and folks can legally house themselves, their friends, organize community events, etc in empty buildings without permission until told otherwise by the owner or someone who has been asked by them to tell you).. are standing in the way of us working on a mass scale, en-culturing, practicing, and experimenting with these new ways of organizing resources, production and management, and how decisions are made about the future of our communities, we

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