

## **Alliance for Sustainable Colorado**

When the Alliance for Sustainable Colorado launched in early 2004, debate focusing on the reality of global climate change was giving way to new arguments about whether these changes, unprecedented in recorded history, were a direct result of human activity. As these new battles lines were being drawn, the Pew Center on Global Climate Change identified a growing number of nonprofit organizations forming to address growing challenges including those to wildlife, the physical environment, local economies and public health. While all of these efforts and initiatives are tremendously important and vital to mitigating further destruction, the reality is that until *all* stakeholders are brought to the table to discuss issues and forge strategies that move sustainability to the forefront of our culture's consciousness, challenges will continue. Such is one aspect of the work of the Alliance for Sustainable Colorado.

During its first five years of operation, the Alliance has realized many significant goals that advance the Alliance's mission to "catalyze that shift toward a truly sustainable world by fostering collaboration among nonprofits, businesses, government and academia". Certainly one of the most visible has been the creation of a home for a number of state, regional and national nonprofit organizations that encourages cooperation and collaboration. In 2004 the Alliance purchased a former warehouse in lower downtown Denver which was completely redeveloped using the most current green building and interior design tools and techniques. By the end of the year, the Alliance Center, as the building became known welcomed its first 25 partners in residence. Not only were these organizations – and the others that have joined them either physically, or virtually through distributed services – able to share administrative and operational resources, they also collaboratively promote a common vision for a sustainable world. Extending this rich appreciation of the value of sustainable stewardship, the Alliance Center as the building is now known,

was the first commercial redevelopment in the United States to receive two LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certifications.

The Alliance also focuses on alliance building that engages a broad constituency of business leaders with industry-specific concerns for sustainability and a willingness to enter into strategic partnerships designed to extend an understanding of the tremendous need for sustainable practice beyond the realm of the nonprofit organization. With this in mind, the Alliance played a key role in the creation of the Colorado Alliance for Sustainable Business Associations (CASBA) in 2004 – 2005. Today, nearly 40 sustainable business alliances representing literally hundreds of Colorado and Rocky Mountain region companies meet regularly to share strategies for introducing sustainable practices into specific industries as well as sharing resources through presentations, panel discussions and regional conferences. The Alliance will continue to play a key role in CASBA and assist industry groups in other states develop similar associations.

It is with a clear eye toward a future of sustainable organizations establishing firm foundations throughout the country that the Alliance leadership and staff stand prepared and eager to provide assistance to individuals and nonprofit groups in other states planning to create centers of sustainable conversation, collaboration and strategic planning. The immense size of this opportunity was made clear this past month during the four days of the Democratic National Convention, held in Denver. The Alliance, with the support of nonprofit organizations, partners in residence and technology-savvy companies with strong Web presence, created “The BIG Tent” event. A two-story, 8,000 square foot tent was erected in the parking area adjoining the Alliance Center. The first floor of the tent was equipped with a large capacity high-speed wireless network that more than 1,000 bloggers from throughout the world used to communicate with their audiences. Not only were they able to describe what was taking place at the Convention just four blocks away, but they also had immediate access

to a tremendous wealth of speakers on topics such as alternative fuels, improving food production and distribution for the world's poorest countries and the need to provide a voice for the world's poor, hungry and ignored as they struggle to build their voice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. During the week, more than 5,000 visitors to the BIG Tent came with interest in issues surrounding sustainability and left, informing others of the tremendous role each individual plays in making this a more sustainable world. While forums such as the Democratic National Convention do not occur with regularity, the lessons the Alliance staff learned as they planned, coordinated and executed this large event, combined with their continued enthusiasm for producing similar learning opportunities in collaboration with organizations in other states speaks well not only for the future of the Alliance as an organization, but for the planet as well as a culture of sustainability begins to take hold.