

Can seniors help “save the world”?

U of O law professor Mary Wood thinks so.

By JANICE DRESSER

UO Law Professor Mary Wood is determined to save the world and believes seniors are her primary allies in her fight against carbon pollution. She likens this fight to a war—an “atmospheric defense effort”—and “seniors are most motivated to solve this problem,” Wood said. “They have the vision and have lived many different lifestyles,” she explained.

Wood believes that seniors’ diligence, unique perspective, and wisdom are necessary attributes for deciphering the deluge of information available about global warming, and for informing others of the peril facing the world’s population if corrective action is not immediately taken. We are facing a challenging future, and “seniors think of themselves as the generation who can save the world,” she said.

Wood is Philip H. Knight Professor of Law and Founding Director of the school’s Environmental and Natural Resources Law Program. In addition, she is Faculty Leader of the program’s Conservation Trust Project, Sustainable Land Use Project, and Native Environmental Sovereignty Project. Wood has published extensively on climate crises and

natural resources and is a frequent speaker on global warming issues.

She said seniors typically pack her lectures and are vocal and enthusiastic. “They aren’t organized yet,” she said, “but I have great hope for this group.” Youth also feel there is a crisis. They are angry and bring a powerful moral perspective, she said. Wood has observed that busy parents are the most complacent group. Absorbed in their daily activities, “They are in denial about the global climate crises. They don’t see what’s coming.”

In August, Wood told her Boise audience at Idaho’s Atmospheric Trust Responsibility public forum sponsored by Green LEEDers, not only what was coming if nothing was done to reduce carbon pollution but offered solutions as well as expressed confidence in the mobilizing ability of the nation’s population. A force she called “planetary patriotism.” Early in her lecture, she quoted James Speth, Dean of the Yale School of Forestry, from his new book, “Bridge at the Edge of the World:” “If we continue to do exactly what we are doing, [even] with no growth in the human population or the world economy, the world in the latter part of this century will be unfit to live in.”

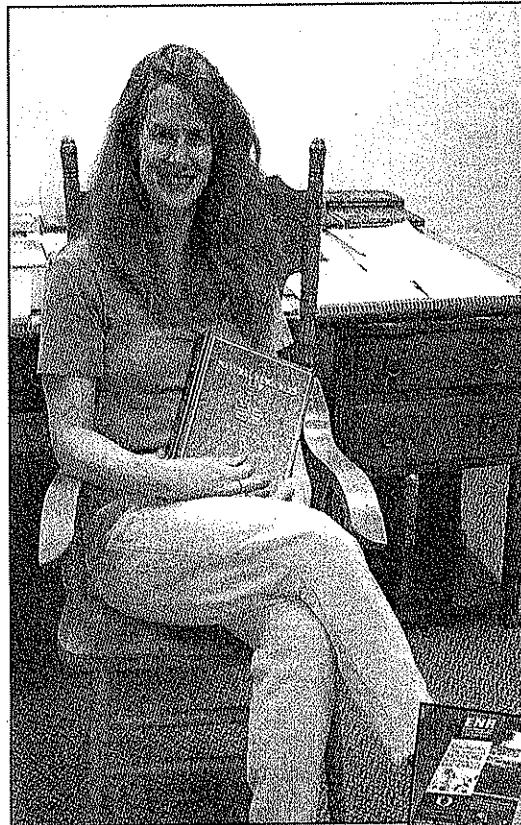
She said grandparents have a tremendous opportunity to awaken their grandchildren’s

community. The private realm is where we can reduce our carbon footprint by living a dif-

ferent lifestyle including reducing automobile use by riding a bicycle or walking whenever possible (Wood bikes everywhere), eliminating air travel, avoiding plastic products, especially water bottles (use an aluminum bottle instead), and buying only locally-grown food or raising our own. This summer, she and her two young sons picked and canned tomatoes, beans, cherries and 300 pounds of pears. She encouraged participation in the community realm by writing letters to newspapers, attending

city council meetings, and meeting with local leaders. In addition, she suggested grandparents take their grandchildren to these public gatherings. She said today’s seniors could be like the Victory Speakers of World War II who were key to quickly mobilizing the nation. These 100,000 volunteers provided leadership and shaped public opinion as they explained the nature of the war’s most vital issues to audiences in forums as varied as theaters, town halls, and schools. The Victory Speakers were typically not the communities’ wealthiest or most prominent citizens, rather they were its bankers, carpenters, housewives, and school-teachers whose character and reputation were more valued than their oratory abilities.

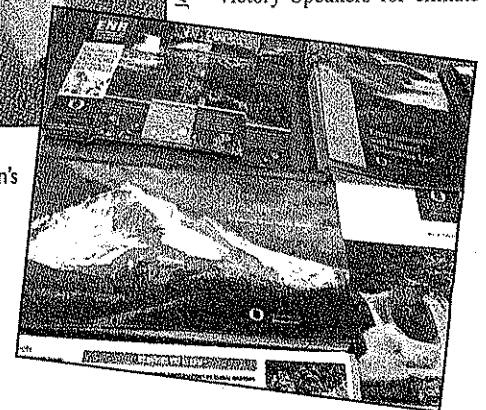
Today, “Seniors could be Victory Speakers for climate



JANICE DRESSER photos

Professor Mary Wood thinks grandparents can play a pivotal role in their grandchildren’s future by taking an active part in fighting global warming. She poses here with the book she co-authored, “Natural Resources Law.”

The office of Environmental Law at the U of O has many books and pamphlets available to the public for viewing (right).



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“A Community of Friends”



interest in environmentally friendly activities. Instead of grandparents giving their grandchildren toys as gifts, she suggested planting a garden together, reminiscent of the Victory Gardens of the second world war. Grandchildren would experience the wonder of food being created from a tiny seed while emotionally connecting with their grandparents who are sharing their wisdom in a side-by-side effort to achieve a shared goal.

Wood said we operate in two realms: private and com-

crises,” she said. “Public sentiment needs to be loud. People have gotten very complacent, and government is asleep at the wheel.” Wood continued, “This is a frightening time for kids. Grandparents can play a role in their grandchildren’s survival and at the same time feel needed and the grandchildren feel protected.”

A number of Professor Wood’s publications can be read on the faculty page of the law school website. The address is <http://www.law.uoregon.edu/faculty/mwood/>.