

## **Highlights of the Conference on Collaborative Practices, October 6-9, 2005**

by Mary Gergen, a Taos Institute Founder and board member in collaboration with Dawn Dole, Executive Director of the Taos Institute

*\*The joining together* - 175 voices, coming from 18 Countries, 34 states, and from many fields of endeavor – social work, therapy, organization consulting, teaching, artistic pursuits, preaching, entrepreneurial activity, philanthropy, law, medicine and other healing arts, all with an open heart and eager mind, curious and enthusiastic about joining into the development of the collaboration that was to characterize the conference.

*\*The place* – Taos, New Mexico, full of enchantment, as the motto of the state assures. The warm fall days welcoming us to bask in dappled sunlight, to dance in the grasses, to greet the morning sun and the setting sun over distant mountains, to feel the breezes from the Rio Grande, and delight in the dark sky, twinkling with stars. The Sagebrush Inn, with country music and western charm, down to the characters at the bar, who were not conferees, became a second home. The rooms with fireplaces of adobe, and views of distant mountains, warm and friendly made a peaceful haven from the whirling excitement of the action around us.

*\*The physical satisfactions* - Hearty breakfasts, delivered in a wink, local wines and foods to satisfy the pallet, a sting of peppers along with the smooth of beans. Jeans and sweatshirts, funky hats and shiny new silver jewelry, shimmering shirts and dancing shoes for the night adorned us all. The smell of applewood smoke, and the sounds of birds filled the air. The beauty of Native American dances and songs moved our spirits. The free afternoon for museums, and shopping, and exploring the ancient and ever-changing surrounds allowed us to experience Taos.

*\*The intellectual and social stimulation* - Collaborative practices proclaimed and developed in each field of endeavor: Plenaries with Diana Whitney on spirituality; Theresa Bertram on Appreciative Inquiry in organizational development; David Cooperrider on Business for World Benefit; Ken Gergen and Sheila McNamee on education; Stan Witkin and Dennis Saleebey on

humor and social construction; Harlene Anderson, Bob Cottor and John Shotter on this thing called therapy. There was an abundance of symposia on positive aging, narrative practices, art, writing, relationships, conflict resolution, forgiveness, movement, storytelling, education, healing, and so much more. For the first time there was a meeting which brought together the Ph.D. students in the Taos/Tilburg program. What an electric feeling as 20 scholars and mentors shared their visions of dissertations together. The pre-conference workshop on social constructionism with Harlene Anderson and Sheila McNamee was a highlight as well.

*\*The friendship and collegiality* - Meeting new people, reuniting with old friends and acquaintances. Lively conversations around the bookstands at break time; walks together in the fields; sharing food and drink; laughing heartily; being blessed. There were no strangers in Taos. What a wonderful feeling to be among friends, with a steady rapport of goodness, but with the freedom to grow in whatever ways felt right in the moment, with no dogmatic program to fulfill.

*A Heartfelt Thank You* – We send out a heartfelt thank you to all of those who participated in making this the best Taos Institute conference ever. All the best.....

Mary Gergen and Dawn Dole