The End Is Near! (Yay!)

Supporters of the Transition movement in the Panida Theater in Sandpoint, Idaho. Surviving economic and environmental upheaval, the group says, depends on working together, not on building bunkers.

By JON MOOALLEM
Published: April 16, 2009

The stage lights went up at the Panida Theater, a classy old movie house in Sandpoint, Idaho, and the M.C. stepped out of the dark with one finger high in the air. There was an uprising of applause and cheering. Then, shouting like a head coach before a bowl game, she said, “Sandpoint, are you ready?”

It was a Friday night last November. All around the little town of Sandpoint, beetles were blighting north Idaho’s pine forests. The previous day, the U.N. reported that emissions from automobiles and coal-fired power plants were collecting in brown clouds over 13 Asian and African cities and blocking out the sun. Iceland’s main banks had crumpled, and American auto executives were about to fly to Washington in private jets to plead for a bailout. Off the coast of Africa, Somali pirates were hijacking oil tankers. But the folks at the Panida Theater wouldn’t stop clapping. The Sandpoint Transition Initiative, a new chapter of a growing, worldwide environmental movement, was officially coming to life.

The Transition movement was started four years ago by Rob Hopkins, a young British instructor of ecological design. Transition shares certain principles with environmentalism, but its vision is deeper — and more...